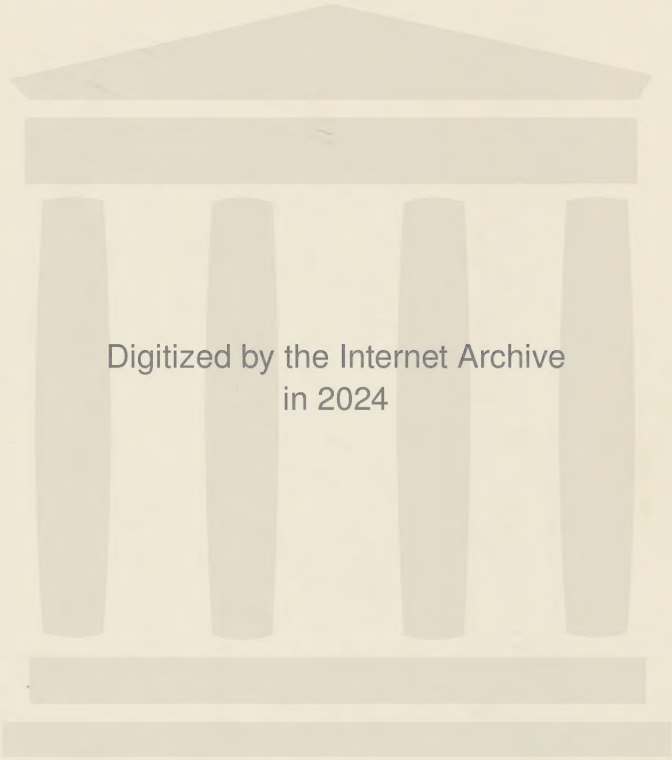

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Kurt W. Treptow, Editor
CLASSICS OF ROMANIAN LITERATURE
Volume I

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1991

SELECTED WORKS OF ION CREANGĂ AND MIHAI EMINESCU

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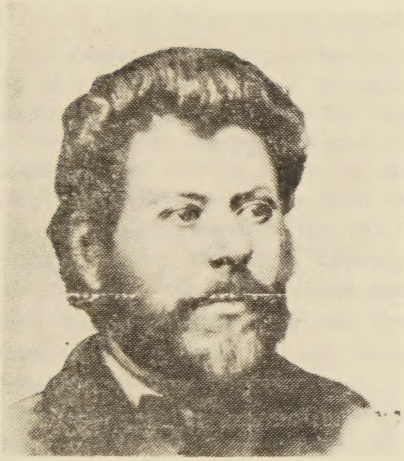
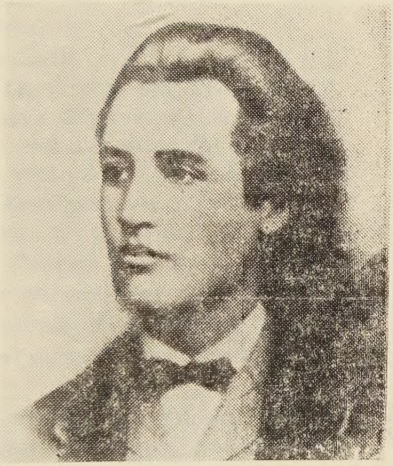


Ion Creangă
(1837—1889)



Mihai Eminescu
(1850—1889)

INTRODUCTION

This is the first volume in a series entitled, *Classics of Romanian Literature*, presented by *East European Monographs*. Its aim is to present major works by some of the leading figures of Romanian Literature in English translations to make them accessible to those who cannot read them in the original language.

The present book is a collection of selected works by two of the giants of nineteenth century Romanian Literature, Ion Creangă and Mihai Eminescu. Though these two men have different styles and personalities, Creangă the peasant storyteller, and Eminescu the poet and educated man of culture, there are ample reasons for presenting them together in this volume. Aside from their close personal friendship and mutual admiration, together the two writers give a broad portrait of nineteenth century Romanian Literature. Creangă and Eminescu may be considered as the two greatest literary personalities of their time; as such, it is only fitting that the first volume of this series, *Classics of Romanian Literature*, should comprise some of the finest works of these two remarkable individuals.

Ion Creangă was born in the humble village of Humuleşti, located in the foothills of the Carpathian mountains in northern Moldavia, in 1837. As the first of eight children, Creangă's mother wanted her oldest son to be educated for the priesthood, traditionally a prestigious position in the village community. Details of Creangă's youth can be extracted from his *Memories of My Boyhood*. He began his education at the village school in Humuleşti, then he studied briefly at Broşteni before returning home and enrolling at a school in neighboring Tîrgu-Neamţ where his teacher was Isaiah Teodorescu, the hero of his story *Father Duhu*. After a year at a seminary in Fălticeni, Creangă left for Iaşi, the Moldavian capital, where he continued to prepare for the priesthood at the school of the Socola Monastery. It is this journey away from the village and region of his youth in 1855 that marks the conclusion of Creangă's literary masterpiece, *Memories of My Boyhood*.

The future writer became a deacon after completing his studies at Socola in 1858, and married the daughter of a priest in Iaşi. Creangă resumed his education in 1864 when he studied to become a teacher at the "Vasile Lupu" school, which was headed by the well

known politician and literary critic Titu Maiorescu. Having impressed his teachers, after a year Creangă became a substitute teacher at the school of the Trei Ierarhi Church. During this time he also collaborated in the writing of textbooks designed to help instructors in the primary schools teach their pupils how to read and write, a project in which he exhibited a meticulous attention to detail. Creangă, however, never adapted himself to urban life. He was constantly in conflict with his superiors in the church for his unholy behavior, such as frequenting the theatre and shooting rooks in the courtyard of the Golia Monastery where he officiated. His private life was no less tumultuous ; his wife abandoned him, leaving him alone with his young son. Creangă's behavior and his criticism of church officials led religious authorities to suspend him, both as a deacon and a teacher. To earn his living he opened up a tobacco shop near the Golia Church where he had formerly officiated. He bought a humble home on the outskirts of Iaşi, which he nicknamed *bojdeucă*. There he lived a peasant style life, much like in the Humuleşti home of his boyhood. Both of these houses can still be visited today. With the help of Titu Maiorescu, Creangă was reinstated as a teacher in 1874. The following year, during an inspection of the school where Creangă taught, he encountered the young poet, who was then working as a school inspector, Mihai Eminescu. A lasting friendship resulted.

Eminescu encouraged Creangă to write down the tales that he frequently recounted orally, and brought him to the Junimea literary society. After this fortunate meeting, Creangă's literary career blossomed. Their friendship and Eminescu's influence on him need not be discussed here as they are the subject of Zoe Dumitrescu-Buşulenga's postscript. Suffice it to say that the bulk of Creangă's literary work, including the selections presented in this book, were written during this period, from 1875 until 1883, when he began to suffer from health problems. He retired as a teacher in 1887 and died two years later, on 31 December 1889, from a fatal attack of epilepsy.

Ion Creangă, the peasant sage, ranks among the leading story tellers in world literature. His works have been translated in over twenty languages. *Memories of My Boyhood*, *Goodman Nichifor Slipboots*, and the tales of *Ion Roată* are literary masterpieces, written in a popular style, which give the reader a vivid portrait of rural life in nineteenth century Moldavia. In his tales, such as *Dănilă Prepeleac*, *The Tale of the Pig*, *The Two Stepsisters*, and *Ivan and His Bag*, a fictional universe is created in which supernatural and mythical figures, such as God and the Devil or Holy Friday, Holy Sunday, and Death interact with ordinary human beings. Creangă's stories and tales are all extracted from the rural society in which he grew up

and demonstrate different aspects of peasant mentality, as well as elements of traditional Romanian folklore. As such, Creangă's writings are an irreplaceable part of Romanian culture.

Mihai Eminescu is the national poet of Romania, and he must be considered as the leading figure of Romanian culture in the nineteenth century. He was born Mihai Eminovici on 15 January 1850 at Botoşani in northern Moldavia. Unlike Creangă, who was from a peasant family, Eminescu was from a family of small boyars whose moderate wealth and social position created many possibilities for the young boy. In 1856 the family, which included eleven children, moved to Ipoteşti, a small village near Botoşani. Shortly after this, in 1858, Mihai was sent away to Cernăuţi, then part of the Austrian Empire, where he proved himself to be a talented student. The young boy demonstrated a wide range of interests, running away with a theatre company for a time in 1864, and assiduously reading the Romanian library of Aron Pumnul, his teacher in Cernăuţi. In 1866, at the age of sixteen, he published his first poem, which commemorated the death of his teacher Pumnul, who had been an ardent Romanian nationalist. The poem appeared in the journal *Familia* in Oradea, whose editor, Iosif Vulcan, changed the name of the poet from Eminovici to the more Romanian sounding Eminescu, a change readily adopted by the young boy.

Eminescu traveled throughout the Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia which had been united in 1859, as well as Transylvania, then under the authority of the Hungarian part of the newly created dual monarchy called the Austro-Hungarian Empire. During this time he took a deep interest in Romanian language and culture and began writing some of his early poems. In 1869 he left to study at the University of Vienna. He became deeply interested in philosophy, reading with enthusiasm the works of such thinkers as Descartes, Spinoza and Kant. He took part in cultural affairs in the Imperial capital, along with other Romanian students, such as the future writer Ioan Slavici. It was during this time that he wrote *Prince Charming, the Tear-Begotten*, a fantastic story containing elements of the Orphic myth, demonstrating the author's desire to integrate universal and Romanian myths.

Briefly returning to Romania in 1872, Eminescu became involved with the Junimea literary society in Iaşi, of which Titu Maiorescu was a leading member. From this time on, Eminescu published much of his literary work in the society's journal, *Convorbiri Literare*. Maiorescu took a strong personal interest in the career of the young poet. After leaving his native land again in 1872, this time to study at the University of Berlin, Maiorescu urged Eminescu to earn his doctorate

so that he could return to Iași as a professor of philosophy at the University. In Berlin, as before, Eminescu exhibited a wide range of interests, encompassing not only philosophy, but also mythology, the history of religions, law, history, and even the Sanskrit language of ancient India. During this time, he also translated Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* into Romanian, but he did not have the desire to complete his doctorate.

Eminescu returned to Romania in 1874 where Maiorescu arranged for him to become director of the Central Library of the University. He also participated in the activities of the Junimea society. It was during this time that he met and fell in love with Veronica Micle, a beautiful poetess who at times inspired Eminescu's poetry. Micle, however, was married to a University professor, and even after her husband's death in 1879, circumstances prevented the two lovers from having a permanent relationship. After losing his position as director of the University Library because of a change of governments, Eminescu became a school inspector. As mentioned earlier, it was at this time that he met and befriended Ion Creangă. His next job was as editor of the newspaper *Curierul de Iași*; it was here that he published the romantic love story, *Caesara*.

After the Junimea society joined the Conservative Party, Maiorescu arranged for Eminescu to become editor of the Party's newspaper, *Timpul*, in Bucharest. Thus, in 1877 Eminescu left Iași, leaving behind both his friend Creangă and his love Veronica Micle. His work at *Timpul* gained him fame and a reputation as an insightful journalist; meanwhile, he continued to write and publish poetry, for which he was renowned, culminating in his masterpiece, the epic poem *Hyperion* which appeared in 1883. In the spring of that fateful year he returned to Iași for the unveiling of a statue of Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great) in front of the Palace of Culture. Though he did not attend the ceremony at a meeting of the Junimea Society he read *Doina*, a bitter nationalistic poem he had written for this occasion, which calls upon Ștefan cel Mare, the famous fifteenth century prince of Moldavia, to rise up from the grave and save Romanians from foreign oppression. Shortly after this Eminescu's health deteriorated, and he began to suffer from periodic fits of madness. When Maiorescu, who had published the first collection of Eminescu's poems late in 1883, presented him with a copy of the book during a visit to the sanitarium where Eminescu was confined, the poet reacted with indifference. Eminescu spent the last six years of his life, before his death in Bucharest on 15 June 1889, in and out of various sanitariums in Romania and abroad.

Eminescu was a complex personality ; at once a philosopher, politician, journalist, and prose writer, but above all, a poet. The range of subjects and emotions displayed in his writings cannot be reduced to a simple formula. His prose works encompass philosophy, fantastic stories, variants on popular traditions and myths, translations of foreign writers, history and politics. The themes expressed in his poetry are likewise vast, ranging from love poems such as *Whenever* or *The Lake* to verses concerning politics and history like *Emperor and Proletarian* and *Satire III*. The expanse of Eminescu's work cannot be summed up in a few well chosen phrases. It must speak for itself.

In the over one hundred years since his death, Eminescu has retained his status as the leading figure of Romanian culture ; he is revered in his native land. As a result, the poet has been dehumanized, transformed into a symbol ; he is now an icon, no longer a man. While Eminescu's poetic genius cannot be denied, it must not be forgotten that he was a man of his time. It would be absurd to think of him as a Romanian version of Shakespeare, for his work will never be assimilated into world culture in the same manner as that of Shakespeare. It is better to refer to him, as the great historian Nicolae Iorga did, as an "expression of the Romanian soul." Ironically, in one respect, the peasant Creangă is much more a universal man than the well educated and widely traveled Eminescu. It is much easier for most foreigners to appreciate and identify with the values expressed in Creangă's writings which exemplify universal characteristics of rural life. Eminescu, on the other hand, must be seen as part of the neo-Romantic movement (which combined Romanticism with certain elements of the Enlightenment) that characterized intellectual life in most of eastern Europe in the mid to late nineteenth century. In this sense, George Bernard Shaw was correct when he referred to Eminescu as, "the Moldavian who raised the XVIII—XIX fin de siecle from its grave." For the Romanians, Eminescu played a role quite similar to that of such men as Vuk Stefanović Karadzić in Serbia, Sami Frashëri in Albania, and Jeronim De Rada amongst the Albanians of southern Italy, to mention only a few. All were men who worked tirelessly on behalf of their nations and who drew on different aspects of western culture in their attempts to foster the development of their own national cultures. As a result, each is still revered by his people and regarded as a leading figure in his national culture. It is in this light that Mihai Eminescu, referring to both the man and his work, must be seen.

I would like to thank the many people who helped make this book possible : the translators, especially Ana Cartianu who translated all of the prose selections in this volume (the works of Creangă in

collaboration with R. C. Johnston), and Sorin Pârvu, Adriana Cişmaş, and Irina Andone for their help whith this project. I would also like to thank the International Research and Exchanges Board, the Romanian Academy, and the United States Department of Education Fulbright-Hays Program for supporting my stay in Romania where the idea for this series wos conceived.

Kurt W. Treptow, editor
Iaşi, Romania
January, 1991

PART I

SELECTED WORKS OF ION CREANGĂ

Translated by Ana Cartianu and R. C. Johnston

Beloved reader,

Many foolish things you may have read in your life, but read these, my stories, too, and if you don't take a liking to them, pick up your pen and write something better yourself. As for myself, that's all the talent I had, and that much I have done.

Ion Creangă

MEMORIES OF MY BOYHOOD

I

I sometimes stop and call to mind the customs and people there used to be in my part of the world at the time when I had, so to speak, just begun to put a foot over the threshold of boyhood in my parents' home in the village of Humulești. It faced the town on the other side of the waters of the river Neamț; it was a large and cheerful village, divided into three closely connected parts: the village itself, the Deleni and the Bujani. Moreover, Humulești in those days was not just a village of ne'er-do-wells but a prosperous and ancient village of freeholders [1], its reputation and standing having long since been assured, with farmers who knew their job, with stalwart young men and comely girls who could swing in the dance and swing the shuttle, too, so that the village would buzz with the sound of looms on every side. It had a fine church and outstanding clergy, church elders[2] and parishioners who were a credit to their village. As for father Ion, who lived at the foot of the hill, Lord, what an active and kind man he was! On his advice lots of trees were planted in the graveyard — which was surrounded by a high fence of thick plants with eaves of shingles — and the fine room at the gate of the church precincts was built to serve as a village school. You should have seen this untiring priest going around the village, entering one house after another, together with one of his churchwardens, master Vasile, the son of Ilioaia, a sturdy, good-looking, handsome bachelor. The two of them would persuade people to send their children for some schooling, and you should have seen the number of boys and girls who flocked into the school from all parts, myself among them, a timid lad, afraid of my own shadow!

Now the brightest school-child was the priest's own little Smaranda, a mischievous, high-spirited girl, quick-witted and so active that she used to put all the boys to shame in

---

[1] Freeholders. Romanian *răzeș* corresponding to English yeoman.

[2] Church elders The Romanian *dascăl* is used here with three meanings in this text: 1) helpers, not ordained, of the priest in the church, where they sing a chant and in parish duties; we translate "elders", "churchwarden"; 2) schoolmaster "dominis"; 3) terms of address to seminarists "young clerics".

both learning and pranks. The priest came to the school almost every day to see how things were going. And one fine day it happened that he came to the school carrying a new, long bench. Having asked the teacher how we were each getting on, he reflected for a little while, then named the bench Dapple-Grey and left it behind in the school.

Another day, the priest again came to the school, with old Fotea, who used to make sheepskin coats for the village and who brought a dear little tawse made of leather thongs, all beautifully plaited, as a gift for the new school. The clergyman named it St. Nicholas, after the patron saint of Humulești. Then he invited old Fotea, when he came across some good pieces of leather, to make another one from time to time, somewhat thicker and stronger if possible. At that master Vasile smiled and we schoolchildren stood staring at one another. Then the priest laid down the law and said that there should be revision every Saturday for all the boys and girls, in other words that the teacher should examine each and every one in what had been learned during the week; for each mistake made, a stroke should be scored in charcoal on a slate or something and eventually every mistake should bring down a blow from St. Nicholas upon the offending child.

Upon which the priest's daughter, being giddy, thoughtless, and full of whims and fancies, suddenly burst out laughing. So much the worse for her, poor thing! "Just come out here, young lady, and mount Dapple-Grey," said the priest now quite sternly, "and let us put St. Nicholas, who's hanging from that nail up there, to his proper business!" In spite of old Fotea's pleading and that of master Vasile, little Smaranda got a good hiding and afterwards sat crying into her cupped hands like a bride, so that the very blouse shook on her back. When we saw this, we were quite dumbfounded.

Meanwhile, from time to time, the priest would bring small coins and cakes from the church offerings and give each his share, so that he tamed us. The boys set up a fresh blackboard each day, and on Saturday there was a revision.

We still went our own ways occasionally, there's no doubt about that! Starting with the sheet of paper propped up by a stick bearing the sign of the Blessed Cross and with the letters of the alphabet, written out by master Vasile for each one of us, we passed on to the shorter catechism and

from thence to the breviary, and from then on we were on our way! When priest and teacher were absent, we would go into the churchyard, keeping the prayerbook open; as the pages were somewhat greasy, the flies and the bumble-bees would come to them in swarms, and when we suddenly clapped the books shut, we often killed twenty of them at one blow. What wholesale destruction we brought upon the race of flies!

One day what should come into the priest's mind but to inspect our prayerbooks. Seeing them all bloodstained, he clutched his head in horror. As soon as he found out how they got into this shocking state, he summoned each one of us in turn to Dapple-Grey's back and began to belabor us with St. Nicholas, bishop *in partibus*, as retribution for the pains the martyred flies and the holy bumble-bees had suffered at our hands.

Not long after this, one day in the month of May, close upon the Whitsun Moşi[1] festival, the Evil One prompted master Vasile, the blockhead, for I have no better word for him, to appoint a fellow called Nică, Costache's son, to test my knowledge. Nică, who was older than me and whose scholarship was a trifle more than non-existent, had quarrelled with me on account of little Smaranda, whom, one day, with every sign of regret, I had been forced to shove away because she interfered with my catching flies. So Nică began to examine me, and he went on examining and examining, and didn't he just score mistakes wholesale on a piece of shingle: one, two, three, and so on up to twenty-nine! "My word, this is ridiculous," I said to myself. "He hasn't yet finished examining me, and think of all the mistakes to come!" All of a sudden, everything went black in front of me and I began to tremble with anger. "Well, well, I am in a spot! What's to be done about it?" I kept asking myself. Slyly I glanced at the door of salvation and kicked my heels impatiently, waiting for some loiterer outside to come in, for there was a school rule that two pupils should not walk out at the same time. My heart was fit to burst within me seeing that no one would come in and give me a chance to escape mounting Dapple-Grey and receiving the blessing of

[1] *Moşi*: literally 'old men'. Festival in commemoration of the dead held on Whit Saturday, and the occasion of a great Whitsuntide fair in Bucharest.

St. Nicholas, that dispenser of black and blue. Yet, the true St. Nicholas seems to have been mindful of me, for, lo and behold, that blessed boy walked into the schoolroom. Whereupon, with permission or not, I made for the door, slipped out quickly, and, never lingering about the school, took to my heels homewards! A glance over my shoulder showed me two hulking brutes already on my tracks. Then I started running so fast that my feet struck sparks out of the ground! I passed our house without going in, turned left and entered the yard of one of our neighbors; from the yard I went into the stableyard, and from the stableyard into the maize field, newly hoed and tilled, with the boys after me. Before they reached me, scared out of my wits as I was, I somehow managed to burrow into the mound at the root of a maize stalk. Nică, Costache's son, with Toader, Catinca's son, an equally loathsome brute, passed by me, saying just what they were going to do to me.

Surely the Lord blinded them, so that they couldn't find me! After a while, hearing no rustling of maize leaves, not even a hen scratching the ground, I suddenly darted out, with earth on my head, and rushed home to mother and began telling her with tears in my eyes that I would not go back to school, no, not if they were to kill me. The next day, however, the priest came to our house and settled things with father; they calmed me down and took me back to school again. "For really, it's a pity to be left without any education," the priest was saying, "you're now past your ABC's, you're working on the prayer-book, and, one of these days, you'll go on to the psalter, which is the key to all wisdom. And who can tell what time has in store for us? Maybe you'll live to become the priest here, at the church of St. Nicholas, because it's for the likes of you that I take the pains I do. I have an only daughter, and I will think seriously about my choice of a son-in-law."

Ieigh ho! Once I heard of the priesthood and of our priest's little Smaranda, I gave up the flies completely and turned my thoughts to other things. I began to take to writing, to preparing the church register, to chanting responses, as if I were a respectable youngster. The priest put me down in his good books and little Smaranda gave a glance at me now and then; Master Vasile entrusted the coaching of other boys to me and, as the saying goes, a different kind of flour

was now being ground in the old mill. Nicâ, Costache's son, loutish and bullying, with his grating voice, had no further hold over me.

But man proposes, God disposes !

One day, in actual fact it was St. Foca's Day, the mayor ordered the villagers out to repair the road. The rumor went that the prince was going to ride that way to visit the monasteries. Master Vasile found nothing better to do than to say : "Come on, boys, let's help with that road, so that the prince won't say, as he passes through, that our village is lazier than the others."

So we all set out from school together. Some of us dug with spades, some carried stones in wheel-barrows, some in carts, some in kneading-troughs ; in short, the people worked with a will. The mayor Nicâ, son of Petricâ, with the overseer, the deputy-mayor, and a couple of tousle-headed clerks, were moving to and fro among the people, when all of a sudden, what should we see but a scuffle on the gravel, a crowd of people in a confused heap and one of them yelling loudly. "What can this mean ?" people were asking as they ran from all sides.

Master Vasile had been caught with a lasso by the militia ; they were now roping him tight and handcuffing him, preparatory to sending him off to the town of Piatra. So that's why the mayor had summoned the people to communal labor. This was the cunning way in which young men were in those days pressganged into military service... This was an evil sight indeed ! The other young men vanished instantly, and as for us children, back we went to our homes, crying. "Curse that dog of a mayor, and, as he has seared a mother's heart, so may today's saint, Foca, burn his heart within him and the hearts of all his accomplices too !" wailed the women of the village, cursing and weeping, scalding tears on all sides. Meanwhile, master Vasile's mother was seeing her son to Piatra and bewailing him as if he were dead. "Never mind, mother, the world is not just the size of the bit of it we can see with our eyes," master Vasile was saying to comfort her. "A man can live in the army as well as anywhere, if there's mettle in him. St. George and St. Demetrius and other holy martyrs were soldiers who suffered for the love of Christ ; pray God we may live up to their example !"

Well, well, we'd lost master Vasile ; he had gone where fate decreed.

Father Ion was now walking about, his long hair floating in the wind, looking for another teacher, but he failed to find a second master Vasile, quiet, hard working, and as shy as a maid. There was, of course, Iordache, the older in the front pew, who spoke through his nose but what good was he? True, he had got the church strains[1] by heart, but he was so old that his teeth chattered and, moreover, he was too fond of his drink. So the school stood deserted for a time. For some of us who clung to Father Ion things went none too badly. it is the church that enlightens a man.

On Sundays we would hum away in the pew and, slap! bang! there was a cake for each of us pinched from the offerings! When the eve of each of the two great festivals came around, some thirty or forty boys would run before the priest, wearing a path through the snow between one house and the next. At Christmas we would neigh like colts[2] while on the Twelfth Night we would bawl the *Kyraleisa*[3] until the village resounded. As Father Ion approached, we stood in two lines and made way for him. Then he would pull his beard and say proudly to the host: "These are the clergyman's foals, my son. They look forward joyfully to great festive days like these throughout the whole year. Have you prepared boiled wheat, sarmale, hemp tarts and cabbage pies for them?" "We have, indeed, holy Father. Please come in and bless our house, and please sit yourselves down so that matchmakers and suitors may do likewise." No sooner did we hear a word mentioned than we fell to. Look out, food's coming! As the old saying goes: Pies make the mouth rejoice, and cabbage pies even more.

Our behavior was only natural, since there are only two such festive eves in the year. At one place, I remember, we crowded around so enthusiastically that we knocked the table over, dishes and all, in the middle of the room, bringing furious blushes to our priest's cheeks. Yet all he said, very goodnaturedly, was: "Where nothing is spread, there's nothing to spill, my sons, but a little restraint wouldn't be amiss!"

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[1] Church strains: the eight fundamental melodies at the basis of church singing in the Greek Orthodox service.

[2] It is usual in Romania for young boys to be called foals (*mînz*) or colts.

[3] *Kyraleisa*: Greek *Kirie Eleison*, 'God's mercy upon us'.

Then upon the festival of the patron saint of the church, the feasting would last a whole week. All you wanted was a belly in which to stow away the corn-meal cake [1] and the various types of food, so numerous were they. Elders, priests, bishops, and all sorts of people from every part came together at this festival in Humulești, and they all left highly contented. What is more, a lot of strangers were well received in private houses. Mother, God rest her soul, rejoiced greatly when visitors happened to drop in and there was occasion to break bread with them. "Maybe my sons will bestow alms in memory of me when I am dead, but maybe they won't; it's better to bestow them with my own hand. Anyhow, closer is my shirt, but closer is my skin! It wouldn't be the first time it happened!"

While I was learning at school, mother was keeping up with me at home, and she was soon able to read the prayer-book, the psalter, and the *Book of Alexander* [2] better than I could, and she greatly rejoiced when she saw that I took to booklearning.

As for my father, he would often tease me:

Little scribbler, no cheese for you,
A cup full of milk that's sour
And nothing in your pockets too.

If he had had his way I might well have stayed where I was: Nică, Ștefan's son and Petrea's grandson, a very decent fellow and a good husband in Humulești. As the saying goes: Better to be a leader in your village, than a laggard in the city.

Mother, however, would gladly have spun the distaff, had that been necessary, to enable me to go on with booklearning, and she would constantly nag father to send me to school again somewhere else; for in church she had heard the saying from *Proverbs* that the learned man should have wisdom and be a master to the unlearned, who should serve him.

Moreover, all the old women who read the future in forty one corn seeds thrown into a sieve, all that dabbled in astro-

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[1] A dish of boiled grain, honey and walnuts carried at the head of funeral procession and later divided among the mourners.

[2] *Book of Alexander*: a fantastic account of the life and conquests of Alexander the Great of Macedonia, derived from a popular book of the Middle Ages.

logy, all the people who told fortunes by cards, whom she had consulted on my behalf, all the church-going women of the village had filled her head with lots of fantasies, each more queer than the other, such as: that I should dwell among the great, that I had no more luck than a frog has hair, that I had an angelic voice, and many more such wonders. As a result of all this, mother, in the weakness she had for me, had come to believe that I should turn out a second Cucuzel [1], that pride of Christendom, who could draw tears out of every stony heart, collect together innumerable hosts of people in the depths of the forest and gladden the entire creation with his song.

"Great heavens, woman, you're mightily lacking in judgment," father used to say, seeing her so passionately wrapped up in my future. "If they were all to turn out full of book-learning, as you think they should, there'd be no one left to pull off our boots. Haven't you heard the story of the chap that went to Paris, wherever that may be" He went an ox and came back a cow! Now, there's Grigore, son of Petrea and grandson of Luca, in our village. What schools did he go to, to learn to make such witty speeches, and to act as usher and reciter of the nuptial poem at weddings? Can't you see that if a fellow has no wits, he just hasn't, and that's the end of the matter?"

"That may be," mother said. "But I want my boy to be a priest, and what have you to say against that?"

"A priest, eh! no less," said father. "Really, now! Can't you see that for a lousy, lazy, good-for-nothing he has no equal? And as soon as you've got him up, he clamors for food. Now when he's small, he catches flies in his prayer-book and goes up and down the river-banks all day long looking for bathing-places, instead of leading those horses out to graze and helping me with various jobs, as much as he is able. In winter he's for ever on the ice and the sled runs. You and your fancy education have given him bad habits, as soon as he's grown up a bit he'll begin chasing skirts, and, as things are, he'll never be any good to me!"

So, as I have the honor to tell you, there was much talk going on between mother and father on account of me, until that summer, around about August, the Right Honorable

[1] Cucuzel from Durazzo in Albania, leader of a school of Church singing.

cholera of 1847 stepped in and began wreaking such havoc on the people of Humulești, right and left, that there was nothing to be heard save weeping and sorrow.

As for myself, little devil that I was, I used to stand by the fence when they drove the hearse past our gate and chant a jingle over the dead man :

Jackdaw, jackdaw, what have you in your pail ?
See me take the chickens' food to the elder vale.
Lucky is the oriole perching on a bough,
He's praying to the burning pyre, the cuckoo takes a bow.
There's naught for me, there's naught for thee,
But for the ghosty goblin in the graveyard now
I have two oxen and a cow, if he'll stop his eerie row !

Or again, I would walk in the procession to the church and return with my shirt stuffed with pretzels, sour-sweetish apples, walnuts in husk, carobs and dried figs from the dead man's tree, so much that my father and mother crossed themselves with wonder when they saw me with such goodies. To get me out of their way, they sent me to the sheepfold in the clearing of Agapii, close by the bridge of Cărăgița, where our own sheep were grazing, to stay there until the sickness had abated somewhat ; but the very same night the cholera struck me down, tearing at my bowels and causing me to double up in two, as if in a vice. My vitals were burning within me for thirst, yet the shepherds and their chief took no notice at all ; I screamed and they just turned over in their sleep and snored on. So I crept as best I could to the well behind the sheepfold and drank a pailful of water in no time. The well served as my camp that night, and I never closed my eyes long enough for a spark to be struck from a flint.

It was only at daybreak that Vasile Bordeianu, our shepherd, took pity on me and went to Humulești, two hours walk away, and told father, who came with a horse and cart to fetch me home. All the way I never stopped asking for water, while father wheedled me away from it from one well to another, until at last, with God's help, we reached Humulești.

When we got there, the village healers, old Vasile Țandură and another fellow whose names I can't remember, were in the house frying some skins of pressed grapes in tallow

in a big cauldron upon the fire. After they had given me a thorough good rub with lovage macerated in vinegar, they spread the warm husks upon a piece of cloth and swaddled me up as they would a baby. In no time at all I fell into a dead sleep and didn't wake up until vespers on the following day — as fit as a fiddle. God rest old Ţandură and his helper! As the proverb has it: a bad penny always turns up. Before nightfall I had already gone around the village, and even had a look at the bathing place with my friend Kiriac, son of Goian, a lazybones and a ne'er-do-well like myself. But father never said a word to me then. He left me to my own devices for the time being.

During the winter, mother was again after father to send me to school somewhere; but father said there was no more money to be spent on me.

"I used to pay just one *sorocovăţ*[1] a month to Vasile, the church singer, son of Vasilica, while that crab Simion Fesu, the church singer from Ţuţuieni, wants three *husăşi*[2] a month just because he talks in riddles and breathes in tobacco all day long, I tell you! This boy, clothes and all, is not worth as many *husăşi* as he's cost me so far!"

When mother heard that, she blew up.

"You poor fool! Since you have not a scrap of book-learning, how can you understand? When you're spending those *sorocovăţi* for your mustache, that's the time to make a fuss! Hasn't Petrea, son of Todosica, our tavern keeper, made nine hundred *lei*[3] off you, and Vasile Roibu, in Bejeni, and many others of the same type, almost so many? Isn't there also plenty to spare for Ruset, Vasile's wife, and Onofrei's Marinuţa? I know more than you think. Don't you believe that Smărăndiţa's asleep. You're a fine one to sleep the sleep of the just, you are! Go, you've no money to spend on your son! Listen, my man, you'll plunge to the bottom of hell and there'll be no one to get you out, if you don't do your best to get one of your sons to be a priest. You avoid confession as the devil avoids incense. You don't go to church from one Easter Sunday to the next. Is that your way of looking after your soul?"

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[1] *Sorocovăţ*, plural *sorocovăţi*: a Russian coin, worth sixpence, that also circulated in Moldavia.

[2] *Husăş*, plural *husăşi*: a Hungarian coin, of about the same value as the *sorocovăţ*, also current in Moldavia in the 19th century.

[3] *Leu*, singular *lei*: the usual unit of currency in Romania.

"Will you be quiet, woman! The church is in a man's conscience, and when I'm dead, I'll lie by the church forever," father said. "Don't you carry on in this way like the hypocritical Pharisee. Rather beat your breast and say as the tax collector did: Lord, be gracious unto me, a sinner who am worrying the life out of my husband and wasting my breath in vain."

In the end, after all the argument between mother and father on my account, mother won the day; for on the last Sunday before Lent mother's father, that was my grandfather David Creangă from Pipirig, came to our house and, seeing the difference that had arisen between father and mother on account of me, he said:

"Never mind, Ştefan and Smărănduca, stop worrying; today is Sunday, tomorrow Monday and market day, but Tuesday if we reach it whole and hearty, I'll take my grandson along with me to Broşteni, with my son Dumitru, to Neculai Nanu, the master of the school founded by Baloş; and you just wait and see what he makes of this boy, for I was highly satisfied with what my other sons Vasile and Gheorghe were taught. These twenty years that I've been mayor at Pipirig, I've only had difficulties with the accounts. What's the good of my reading any ecclesiastical book? If you can't put things down in writing, be it ever so little, it's hard. But since my sons have been back from school they keep the accounts for me, penny by penny, and I just take it easy; I now say with complete confidence that you may be mayor for a lifetime and never feel it a burden. My word, a good deed Alecu Baloş has done with that school of his for anyone who'll take the trouble to learn; and, Lord, what a wise and capable teacher he has found! He talks so gently and he receives everyone so kindly that it is a pleasure to have him as a teacher. He's a credit to the parents who bore him. Such a kindly soul of a man, there's no gainsaying it. And for us mountain people particularly it is a great blessing! More than sixty years ago, when I came with father and my brothers Petre, Vasile, and Nică from Transylvania to Pipirig, such schools were not to be found. Maybe at Iaşi or at the Neamţ monastery there might have been some like this one in the time of the Metropolitan Jacob; he was distantly related to us through Ciubuc, the bellringer at Neamţ, your mother's grandfather, daughter Smaranda, whose name

stands engraved to this day upon the church bell in Pipirig. Ciubuc, the bellringer, had learned his letters in Transylvania, like myself, and then he left those parts and wandered away, as we did; he came over here with his belongings, like old Dediu of Vinători and other "moţani"[1] mainly to avoid being turned into a papist, as far as I know. He was so well-off that his sheepfolds and herds of cattle spread over mountain after mountain: Halăuca, Peatra lui Iepure, Bărnariul, Cotnărelul and Boampele until as far as Piatra Vodă. This Ciubuc was said to be a decent, generous fellow; every traveler who stopped at his house was hospitably received and fare in plenty was placed before him. He was famous far and wide for his kindness and riches. The Prince himself is reported to have once put up at his house and upon his asking with what men he held together such a sea of belongings, Ciubuc is said to have answered: "With those weak of mind, but strong of body, your Highness!" Then the Prince could hardly conceal his surprise and he said: "Now here's a man indeed, I'll vouch for it. Were there many such under me, the country would be safe in time of need." And the Prince gave him a friendly tap on the shoulder, saying to him:

"Goodman, remember that you're my man from now on, and my door is always open to you."

From that time on Ciubuc was known as the Prince's man, so that to this day, a certain hill over by the Pietun, where Ciubuc was usually to be found, is called the Man's Hill.

Upon this hill, daughter Smaranda, we took refuge at the time of the 1821 uprising, with your mother, yourself and your brother Ion, scared off by a band of Turks who had been recently fighting with the volunteers at Secu and were then making their way to Pipirig in search of plunder; and, being in such a hurry, we had left behind your baby sister Mărioara in her wooden cradle, upon the verranda. When your mother discovered that the child was missing, she began to tear her hair out of her head and to howl but in a subdued voice, saying:

"Woe is me, woe is me, my child has been stabbed to death by the Turks!"

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[1] *Moean*: wealthy sheep-rearing Transylvanian peasant; Transylvanian shepherd in the Carpathians.

I then climbed to the very top of a fir tree and as soon as I saw the Turks turning towards Plotun I madly jumped upon the back of a horse, galloped home and found the baby safe and sound, but the cradle and all had been overturned by some pigs who were rummaging around, ready to tear her to pieces. At one end of the cradle I found a few Turkish coins, which the Turks, as it seemed, had placed by the child's head. Then I picked the child up and I was so overjoyed that I don't know how I got back to your mother on Man's Hill. When I had recovered a bit, I said bitterly like many another before me: 'Those who have no children don't know what trouble is.' Some people are sensible in this respect and stay unmarried. One such person was Ciubuc, the Transylvanian sheepowner, who later on in life, having no wife and child, moved by his deep piety or by other circumstances, gave over all his goods and chattels to the Neamt monastery and became a monk with almost all his herdsmen, chanting many a mass during his lifetime; and now he dwells in peace under the walls of the monastery, may the Lord's grace be upon him, and may he rest in peace in the kingdom of heaven! For we, too, shall make our way there very soon! Now, you'd have had no inkling of all those happenings if I hadn't told you, would you?" grandfather said with a sigh.

"It's a good thing, my son, that your boy should have some booklearning, not necessarily in order to be ordained, as Smaranda plans, for a priest's calling is an exacting business and difficult to fulfill, and if he's not the right sort, better none at all. Yet booklearning brings some consolation in itself. If I hadn't been able to read, I would long since have been out of my mind with all the troubles I've had to bear. But I have only to open the *Lives of the Saints* and therein I find all kinds of things and I say: 'Lord, great is the endurance that Thou hast granted Thy chosen ones. Our hardships are child's play compared to what we read about in the books.' Besides, it's no good for anyone to be a complete ignorant. There is much wisdom to be got out of books and truth to tell, you're no longer just a cow for anyone to milk. The boy, as I can judge, has a good memory, and considering the amount of schooling he has had, he sings and reads as well as one could wish."

These and other things grandfather David talked over with mother and father all through the night from Sunday

to Monday to Tuesday; for he used to stay with us when he came from Pipirig to market, to buy the things he needed.

On Tuesday at daybreak he placed the wooden saddle and the pairs of bags across the horses backs; then neatly tying the bridle of the second to the tail of the first, the third to the tail of the second, the fourth to the tail of the third, as mountain people do, he said:

"Now, you two, Ştefan and Smarandă, God keep you in good health, for I'm about to set off. Come, grandson, are you ready?"

"Ready, grandfather, off we go!" I said, giving my full attention to some smoked pork chops and some fried sausages that mother had placed before me. Taking leave of my parents, I proceeded with grandfather on our way to Pipirig. There was a bit of a frost that morning, sharp enough to split wood. And just above Vinători, as we were crossing the bridge over a tributary of the River Neamţ, grandfather walking behind holding the horses bridles, myself walking in front of him, my boots slipped and I fell full length into the Ozana! Thank God grandfather was there! "Now, those worn-out boots of yours are all too silly," he said, quickly lifting me out of the water, soaked to the skin and frozen to the bone for water had leaked in everywhere.

He quickly took off my shoes, which were frozen stiff. "A good old fashioned wrap-around boot's the thing! Your foot feels comfortable in it and when it's frosty you're as snug as can be." In the time it took to say this I found myself already wrapped up in a fluffy shepherd's coat from Casina, crammed into a bag on horseback, on and away to Pipirig. And when Grandmother saw me and the state I was in, stuck in that bag like some waif, she nearly dissolved into tears. Never yet have I seen such a woman, to cry over every little thing; she was soft-hearted beyond all measure. She did not eat meat, ever, for the same reason, and on holy days when she went to church, she wept for all the dead in the curchyard, kin or strangers, it made no difference. Grandfather, however, was an extremely level-headed fellow; he minded his business as he saw fit, and left grandmother to her own devices, like the mere woman she was.

"Good Lord, David, what will you be up to next? Why ever must you fetch the boy out in this weather?"

"Just to give you something to wondr at, Nastasia," grandfather said, fetching a wild boar's hide out of the lumber room and cutting out a pair of wrap-around boots for Dumitru and another for myself. Then he gathered them nicely and threaded a pair of horse-hair bindings through the little hooks.

On the third day after this, provided with clean underwear and two pairs of foot wrappings made of stiff white cloth, we slipped on our new boots and, having kissed grandmother's hand, we took the Boboiești road, with grandfather once more, as well as Dumitru, mother's youngest brother. After climbing behind the Hălăuca, we eventually reached Fărcașa, and that was our resting place for the night. Our company there was father Dumitru from the Pîrăul Cîrjei, who had a goiter upon his neck as big as a large wine flask, and he would cackle and snore as if from a bag pipe, so that I got not a wink of sleep on account of him all night long. He was not to blame, poor man, and as he himself used to say : "Those who have a goiter in the head are worse off than those who wear it outwardly."

The next day we left Fărcașa, passing through Borca to the Pîrîul Cîrjei and Cotîrgeni and so on until we reached Brosteni. Having placed us in lodgings at his own expense, in the house of a woman whose name was Irinuca, grandfather then took us to call upon the teacher, took us to the church and made us cross ourselves before all the icons, and then left us with his blessing and went home, occasionally sending us what was needed.

Now in the village of Brosteni, which was spread out like most mountain villages, the wolf was not shy of putting in an appearance in broad daylight. The houses were dotted about irregularly, one under a steep hollow bank, another beyond the Bistrița nestling in another such ravine, in short, wherever man found it convenient to build a house. Irinuca had an old hut, built of wooden logs, with windows as broad as the palm of your hand, roofed with planks, fenced in with rough-hewn pieces of fir, standing right under a steep descent, on the left bank of the Bistrița, close to the bridge. Irinuca was a woman neither very young, nor very old ; she had a husband, as well as a daughter, who was so ugly and cross-eyed that you were afraid to spend the night under the same roof with her. Fortunately, from Monday morning until Saturday night she was not to be seen. She went up the mountains with her father wood-chopping and

she would work there like a man all week long for practically nothing. Conditions were such that two people with two oxen could hardly earn their "mămăligă" [1] in winter time. Nay, it happened to many a man that he came back on a Saturday night with a broken leg or with his oxen badly hurt, and this he had to accept as part of the bargain!

The hut on the left bank of the Bistrița, the man, the girl, the oxen in the woods, one billy-goat, and two lean shabby nannies which always slept in the lobby, that was Irinuca's whole fortune. Yet that really is a fortune when you're strong and healthy. But what business is that of mine? Let us rather get back to our own business.

The very next day, after grandfather had gone back home, we too went to school. The teacher, seeing that we wore our hair long, ordered one of the schoolboys to cut it off. When we heard those dread words, we began to cry our hearts out and to beg in the name of all the gods, that we should not be made frights of. But no, we had mistaken our man; the teacher stood by and had our heads cropped close. Then we joined the ranks of the other pupils and he set us things to learn according to our ability; among other things we had to learn the "Angls cried aloud" by heart.

We went on like that right into mid-lent.

One fine morning we woke up covered from head to toe with goats' scab, caught from Irinuca's goats. Ugh! what was to be done? The teacher wouldn't have us in the schoolroom. Irinuca could not cure us, there was nobody to let grandfather know, our provisions were almost eaten up, — an evil plight indeed!

I don't quite know how it came about, but close upon the Day of the Annunciation, a sudden spell of warm weather set in, such as you've never seen the like of; and the snow melted, and the streams flowed and the Bistrița swelled between its two banks nearly carrying Irinuca's house away.

And during those warm days we would anoint our bodies with newly boiled lye, then lie in the sun until the ashes stood dry upon our skin and then step into the Bistrița and bathe. An old woman had taught us this as a means of getting rid of the scab. You can imagine what it meant go before twice a day in the Bistrița at Broșteni, before Easter. Neither shooting

[1] *Mămăligă*: mush made of maize flour. This was, and still is a basic item in the diet of a Rumanian peasant. Here the phrase means: to earn their keep.

pains, nor ague, nor any other sickness did we get, nor did we get rid of the scab for that matter. As the saying goes : it clings to a man, like the scab. One day, Irinuca having gone into the village where she could lose all sense of time, what did we do but climb the steep slope behind her house, each carrying a rough-hewn plank in our hands ; the streams were coming down something wonderful, one especially, as white as boiling milk. The devil prompted us to shift a rock that was precariously balanced, whereupon the boulder started rolling down and bouncing head high, and it went right through Irinuca's fence and the lobby where the goats lived and made straight for the Bistrița, setting the waters a-boiling ! This happened on St. Lazarus's Day, about noon. What in Heaven's name was to be done ? The woman's fence and house smashed to bits, a she-goat crushed to pieces, that was no joke ! Scab and all were now forgotten in this fright.

"Be quick and get your things together before the old woman comes and let us run away and catch the raft [1] to my brother Vasile at Borca," said Dumitru, since the rafts were already running.

We gathered the few things we had, hurried down to the rafts and the raftsmen readily agreed and set off. What Irinuca said behind our backs, what she didn't, I do not know ; one thing I do know, that I was scared stiff all the way to Borca, which was the goal of our voyage. And next day, which was Palm Sunday, we left Borca at daybreak in the company of two peasants from the mountains, riding their horses ; we cut across the Old Highlands way down to Pipirig. That Sunday was a fine day and the peasants were saying that they had never seen such an early spring, not since they were born.

Dumitru and I never stopped singing, gathering bluebells and violets on the hillside, playing and capering as if we had nothing in common with those scabby fellows in Broșteni who had worked such blessings upon Irinuca's house. As we were going along like this, about noontime [illegible] weather suddenly changed into a fearful [illegible] literally brought [illegible], crashing [illegible]. Maybe old Mother Dochia [2] had not taken off all her sheepskin coats.

[1] Timber floated down-stream to sawmills and timber yards.

[2] *Mother Dochia :* According to popular belief the end of winter was symbolized by Mother Dochia taking off her fur coats one by one over the first nine or twelve days of March. When the last coat was off, winter was really over.

It began to drizzle, it turned to sleet, then it grew cold and started to snow in earnest, and in a twinkling the road was blocked and there was no knowing which way to turn. There was snow and fog everywhere, so that a man could not see his companion though they were walking side by side.

"We've given the weather the evil eye," one of the peasants said with a sigh. "I did think it strange that the wolf should have swallowed the winter so speedily. We've lost our way around about the weaning folds. Now let us blindly cut across country and go where fate takes us."

"I seem to hear a cock crowing," the other man said, "Let us walk that way, maybe we'll come across some village."

Down we went and down again, with great difficulty down perilous slopes, getting tangled in the undergrowth of a fir copse and the horses would slip and roll downhill. Dumitru and I walked shivering and crying into our fists with cold. The peasants just groaned and bit their lips in anger. The snow was waist-high in certain places and night had begun to fall when we came to a dead end in the mountains near the streamlet running, like ourselves, from the uplands into the valley, rushing and crashing against those rocks, whether it could or not. The only difference being that it went its way, while we came to a standstill and were really in a desperate plight.

"Now boys, let us sing and praise the Lord," one of the men said, getting to work with his flint and tinder, and setting a fir-tree alight.

"Whatever is ordained stands written upon a man's brow; make merry and be of good cheer," the other one said taking a large piece of cold mămăligă out of his saddlebag, toasting it lightly upon the embers and giving us each a piece. That piece of mămăligă slipped more easily down our gullets than if it had been buttered! When we had done something to appease our hunger we curled up near the fire: snow overhead, sludge underneath; one side of us was freezing, the other baking, as befitted the time and place.

And while we were thus tossing about, another trouble lay in store: the burning fir tree very nearly scorched us to death, and we were only saved thanks to one of the mountain fellows. Maybe Irinuca's curse had now come upon us.

Day broke at last and having rubbed our bodies with snow and crossed ourselves according to the custom of Christians, we set off with the two peasants climbing back all the way we had come. The snow was not falling so thickly now and after a good deal of trouble we found our way. On and on we trudged and by nightfall we reached grandfather David's at Pipirig. And no sooner did grandmother see us than she burst into tears of joy.

"I'm convinced this David of mine will bring me to the grave with his goings on. Just look at the sores on them, poor darlings! The scab has eaten into them among those strangers, poor lambs!"

After she had sympathized with us and wept over us, as it was her custom to do, and after she had crammed us full of the choicest things she had to eat, she went into the pantry, fetched a jugful of birch ointment, rubbed our bodies with it from head to toe and bade us lie upon the stove and keep warm. She rubbed the ointment into us two or three times a day and during the night as well, so that on Good Friday we were as fit and smooth-skinned as ever. By that time news had also come, from Brosteni, of the damage we had brought there, and grandfather, without protesting too much, settled with Irinuca for four gold ducats. Then, on Black Saturday, he sent me home to Humulesti, and on Easter Day I sang out such an "Angels cried aloud" in church, that the whole congregation gaped at me, and mother felt like swallowing me whole with joy. Father Ion sat me down at the table with him and little Smaranda cracked plenty of red eggs with me,[1] and joys of all sorts were pouring down upon me.

Yet the second Easter service was not such a success, for all the girls in the village had come to church; some of them being more frivolous, burst out laughing as soon as ever they set eyes on me and kept on chanting:

Cropped head of hair,
Cropped head of hair,
The dogs will have their share!

[1] To break or crack eggs: Greek Orthodox custom accompanied by the words: "Christ is risen!" to which the reply is: "He is risen indeed!".

II

I don't pretend to know what other people are like, but for myself, I seem to feel my heart throb with joy even to this day when I remember my birthplace, my home at Humulești, the post supporting the flue of the stove around which mother used to tie a piece of string with tassels at the end of it with which the cats played until they dropped exhausted, the flat ledge of the stove that I used to cling to when I was pulling myself up and learning to walk, the place on top of the stove where I used to hide when we children played hide and seek, as well as other games and delights full of childlike fun and charm. Lord, what good times they were, for parents and brothers and sisters were healthy and hearty, there was everything necessary in the house, the sons and daughters of our neighbors were for ever romping with us, and everything was exactly as I liked it best, without a shadow of ill-humor as if the whole world were mine! I myself was as happy as the day was long, giddy, and playful like the gusting wind.

Mother, who was well-known for her oddity, would say to me sometimes as the sun peeped from behind the clouds after a prolonged rain: "Go outside, you fair-haired child and laugh at the sun, maybe the weather will change." And the weather did change at my smile.

The sun, no doubt, knew what I was capable of, for I was mother's own son, and she in truth could work wonders: she could drive away the black clouds overhanging our village and drive the hail away into other places by sticking the axe into the ground outside the door. She would make such excellent jelly out of a couple of beef bones and water that the people crossed themselves in amazement. She would hit the ground, the wall or any wooden thing that I bumped my head against saying: "Take that!" and forthwith the pain was gone. When the red embers moaned in the stove, which is supposed to foretell wind and bad weather, or when the embers hissed, a sign that there is talk about you, mother would scold the hearth and beat it with a poker to make the enemy shut up. More than that, if I didn't look as well as she thought I ought to, she would immediately lick her finger and make a muddy mixture with dust from the heel of her shoe, or, if she was in too much a hurry for that, she would take soot from the stove and say: "As heel

or stove are free of the evil eye so let my baby be free of it!" and she would make a mark on my forehead lest her precious pet come to harm.

That's what mother was like when I was a child, full of strange and wonderful practices, as far as I remember; and well I do remember, for she rocked me in her arms as I sucked at that sweet breast of hers and nestled in her bosom, babbling and fondly looking up into her eyes! I have taken my blood of her blood and my flesh of her flesh; I've learnt speech from her and wisdom from God at the time when a man has to distinguish between good and evil.

But time was craftily rushing by me and I grew up unawares; thoughts ever different crossed my mind and desires ever new stirred in my soul, and instead of growing wiser I grew more and more restless and my longings now knew no bounds. Fickle and deluding is man's thought and you soar upon its wings at the bidding of ceaseless yearnings and there is no peace until you're laid in your grave!

But woe to him who gives in to such thoughts! Imperceptibly the river of life is rising and sucking you into the deep; and from the height of happiness you're suddenly cast down into the depths of sorrow.

Let us rather talk of the days of our childhood, for childhood alone is merry and innocent. And there, when all is said and done, is the truth of the matter.

What does a child care when father and mother talk about the hardships of life, of what tomorrow may hold in store for them, or when they are worried by harrying thoughts? Astride a stick a child thinks he is riding a most wonderful horse and gallops apace in high spirits, purposefully whips it and curbs it and shouts at it until you're deafened; and if he falls, he thinks it's the horse that's thrown him and it is the stick that bears the brunt of his anger.

That is what I was like at that happy age and that's what I think all children have been like ever since the beginning of the world, no matter what people may say.

Whenever mother was tired out and lay down a little to rest, we children would raise the roof. When father came home at night from the woods at Dumesnicu, frozen stiff and covered with frost, we would give him a fright by springing upon him, from behind, in the dark. And he, tired though he was, would catch hold of us, one by one, as in a game of blind man's buff, and would lift us to the ceiling

saying: "What a tall boy!" and he would kiss us to his heart's content. When the oil lamp was lit and father sat down to his meal, we would fetch the cats from their nooks in the stove or under the oven and we would rumple their fur and drill them before him so thoroughly that they had a rough time of it; and they couldn't get away, poor cats, before they had scratched and spat at us as we deserved.

"And there you are husband, looking at them and encouraging them, aren't you?" mother would say, "I say, well done, cats! And as for you boys, you're a couple of rascals, for no living thing can find shelter in this house because of you. Since I've not given you a thrashing today, you plague those poor cats and jump upon a man as if you were dogs let loose! I'm blessed if I don't think that you've got a bit of the devil in you and that sometimes you go a bit too far. Just let me get that stick from behind the rafter and I'll beat you black and blue."

"Come, leave them alone, wife, do; they're glad to see me back home, that's all," said father, swinging us up and down. "They've not a care in the world: the wood is in, there's plenty of lard and flour in the attic, cheese in the wooden tub, likewise cabbage getting sour in the barrel, thank God! Let them just keep fit to eat and play now that they're small, for they'll get over romping as they grow up and cares gather around them; they won't escape that, never fear. Don't you know the saying: a child shall play, a horse shall draw, and a priest shall read."

"It's easy for you to talk," said mother, "for you're not shut up in the house with them all day long. That's enough to make your hair turn white and make you wish the earth would swallow them up, God forgive me! I wish the summer would come so that they could play outside a bit; for I've had more than enough of them. All the devilish tricks that come into their minds, they put into practice. When the wood tapping[1] begins to summon people to church, out rushes Zahei, that perfect child of yours, and starts tapping the loom so that you can hear the very walls of the house creaking and the windows rattling. While Ion, that block-

[1] As well as ringing bells, a long piece of wood is rythmically beaten with a mallet before service time, to call the worshippers to church.

head, with hammer and tongs raises such a hullabaloo that it very nearly deafens your ears ; then, with a rug on their backs and a paper cap on their heads, they sing :

Halleluia ! It's God's wish,
Our priest has gone and caught a fish !

until they drive you out of the house. And this goes on every day, two or three times a day, so that you would feel like giving them an almighty thrashing, if you were to take any notice of them."

"In a way it's as it should be, my good woman : you're a church-goer and known for it too, so the boys are providing you with a church service to your heart's content on the spot ; not that the church is so very far... From now on, set to work, boys, upon all night vigils and as many odd ideas as you please, so that every day mother may give you buns with a glazing of honey, such as they have on the day of the Forty Martyred Saints, and boiled wheat [1] with walnuts !"

"Indeed, are you in your right mind, my man ? I did wonder why they're so good, poor dears ; it's because you're encouraging them and backing them up. Just look at them, both sitting wide awake and staring into our eyes as if they were trying to make a portrait of us. Just you try to give them a job to do, then you'll see them trembling, sulking and whining." mother said. "Come now, off you go to bed, boys, for the night is soon gone, but what do you care as long as you get your food served up under your noses !"

When we had all gone to bed, children will be children : we'd start fighting and wouldn't sleep for giggling and playing until mother, poor dear, had to pull our hair and give us a few thumps in the back, and father, having had enough of such a row would sometimes say to mother :

"Come, come, shut up ! That's enough slapping and scolding. They're not old women who go to sleep standing up." But mother woud then give us a few more thumps, saying :

"Take that and behave yourselves, you devils ! I can't even rest at night because of your giggling."

Only in this way did my poor mother get some peace at last, God rest her now ! But do you think that was the end of the matter ? No sir ! The following day at dawn, we

[1] Romanian colivă.

would begin again, so mother took down "Godmother" again and thrashed us, but do you think that made any difference to us? You remember the saying:

Wicked, nasty skin
Minds no salve nor stick.

I recall as if they happened yesterday the things that came in our heads and all the myriads of things we did. Just try and remember every trifle of recent events and see if your mind is equal to the task, brother Ion.

At Christmas when father killed the pig, singed and scalded it and quickly wrapped it up in straw to make it sweat, and thus easier to shave, I would bestride the pig, straw and all, and I would have the time of my life knowing that I would get the pig's tail to fry and the bladder to fill with grains, to blow it up and rattle when it was dry; and then, alas, what a time mother's ears had of it, until she'd break it over my head!

But I mustn't lose the thread of my story!

One St. Basil's Day,[1] we boys of the village planned to take the New Year's plow[2] around the village, for I was now in my teens, worse luck. And on the eve of that Saint's day I plagued father all day to make a bull drum[3] for me; or, if not that, at least a fine whip.

"Heavens alive, I'll give you a whip, my boy," father said after a while. "Haven't you enough food at my house? Do you want those good-for-nothings to dump you in the snow? Just wait and I'll take your boots away, and then we'll see if you're so keen to go out."

Seeing that he was treating me in this fashion, I slipped out of the house with only the pig's bladder, lest father should get hold of my boots and I be the laughing stock of my comrades. And it somehow came about that none of my companions had a bell. My cowbell was at home, but dare I go back for it? To make a long story short, we did

[1] Saint Basil's Day: New Year's Day.

[2] The plow: peasant custom. A group of children going from house to house singing and offering good wishes for the New Year.

[3] *Buhai:* instrument consisting of a bottomless wooden tub, the upper aperture covered with sheep skin. A strand of horsehair passes through a hole in the middle. When pulled, it makes a noise like the roaring of a bull.

our best and got together a broken scythe, a shaft-coupling, a pole hook with a ring to it, together with my pig's bladder. We started from Father Oşlobanu's, right up at the top of the village, planning to walk through the whole village. When we got there, the priest was outside his house sawing wood upon a trestle. As soon as he saw us standing under his window and getting ready for caroling, he muttered a few oaths under his breath and said :

"The fowls have hardly gone to roost and here you are already ! Just you wait a little, you little wretches and I'll give you something !"

Thereupon we took to our heels, followed by the priest with a cudgel hard on us, for Father Oşlobanu was an ill-tempered, crusty old fellow.

We were so scared, we'd run halfway back through the village without having taken the opportunity to wish the priest :

A floor with fungus inches deep,
Toadstools up the wall that creep,
Children fat and loathsome too,
Dozens of them you shall rue.

as carol singers do at the houses that don't receive them.

"My word, what a devilish wicked priest," we said once we were all together, stiff with cold and frightened to death; "he very nearly crippled us. May we live to see him carried upon the bier into the church of Saint Demetrius under the castle, to which he is now attached. None other than Old Nick could have bidden that monster to come and build his house in our village. God forbid that our priests should be like him, for you wouldn't so much as taste any of the church offerings, ever !" By the time we had slandered the priest and said nasty things about him, and done a few other things, dusk had set in.

"Well, what are we to do now ? Let us go into this yard," said Zaharia, son of Gîtlan, "for we're wasting time standing here in the middle of the road."

And in we went, to Vasile-Aniței's and stood under the window as was usual. But for sure the Evil One was making charms : one fellow did not strike his scythe because he was cold, another because his hands were freezing upon the shaft-

coupling ; my cousin Ion Mogorogea, the pole-hook under his arm, would argue and wouldn't carol. It was enough to make your heart burst with anger.

"You do the wishing, Kiriac," I said to Goian, "you, Zaharia and myself will roar like bulls, and these other fellows will join in the chorus."

And we started right away. And what do you think happened ? That mean wicked wife of Vasile-Aniței came at us with a red-hot fire-rake she was using to rake out the fire before cooking the pastry in the oven.

"May the fire consume you !" she said, thoroughly incensed. "What do you think you're up to ? Who taught you to do this ?"

Now run for it, boys, quicker than we ran from Father Oșlobanu !

"A fine mess this !" we pondered, stopping at the crossroads in the middle of the village, close by the church. "One or two more welcomes like that and we'll be driven out of the village, like gypsies. We'd better go home to bed."

Having settled things for the following year and sworn a solemn oath to go caroling together again, we parted, stiff with cold and weak with hunger, and off we each went to our own house and mighty glad we were to be back. And that's the story of our carol-singing that year.

And when it came to creaming the milk-pots, what a pickle I got into.

Be it fasting time or carnival, as soon as mother started to put out the milk to curdle, the very next day I began licking the curd off the top and continued to do so, day after day, till I reached the sour milk beneath. When mother came to skim the cream, skim it, Smaranda, if there is any !

"Maybe the witches have worked a charm upon the cows, mother," I would say crouching in front of mother, by the pots, my tongue hanging out of my mouth.

"Lord, let me just catch that hobgoblin by the cream pot," mother would say, giving me a searching look, "and leave him to me ! Godmother up there behind the rafter will doctor him, so that the tribe of ghosts and witches will not get him out of my hands. You can tell the ghost who's eaten the cream by his tongue. I could never stand a thief and a sneak and that's the honest truth, my boy. And mind you, God won't prosper him who steals, whether it be clothes or foodstuffs or whatever it may be."

"That did it! Strike a match and the house is on fire," I said to myself, for I was not so stupid as to miss the meaning of her words.

When it came to old Chiorpec, the shoemaker, our neighbor, the trouble I had with him I can't describe; or rather, truth to tell, it was he who had trouble with me; for every few days I would go and pester him to give me straps for a whip. More often than not I found old Chiorpec rubbing the finest birch-oil into the uppers of boots, making them as soft as cotton wool.

And this good man, seeing that there was no way of getting rid of me, would gently raise my chin with his left hand and with his right would dip the stick into the pot of birch-oil and would give me a good rubbing round the muzzle, so that all apprentices in the shop split their sides with laughing. And when I slipped out of his hands, I'd go back to mother's, running all the way, crying and spitting right and left.

"Look, mother, what that devil Chiorpec's done to me."

"Lord, it's done as if for the asking," mother said, rejoicing, "I'll thank him, my word, I will, when I meet him: for you stick like a burr wherever you go and drive a body out of his wits with your impertinence, idle wretch that you are!"

On hearing this I quietly washed my face around my mouth and saw to my own troubles. And as soon as I'd forgotten the trick he'd played on me, back I'd run to old Chiorpec for straps, as soon as he saw me come in, he'd say in high spirits: "Hi! welcome, young pig's chap!" and again he'd give me a good rubbing, making a laughing-stock of me, and again I'd run home, crying, spitting and cursing, and mother had an awful time with me because of that.

"I do wish winter would come, so that I could send you somewhere to school again," mother would say. "I'll ask the teacher to send to me just the skin off your back and the bones from your body."

It was summer time, around about the *Moşi* festival, when I sneaked out of the house and went, in broad daylight, to uncle Vasile's, father's eldest brother, to steal cherries; for in his garden, and in a couple more places in the village, there stood cherry trees the fruit of which was just turning ripe about Whit Sunday. I made very careful plans so as to get the cherries without being caught.

First I brazenly went into my uncle's house and asked if Ion could go swimming with me.

"He's not in," aunt Marioara said, "he's gone with your uncle Vasile, on the road by the Castle, to a felt mill at Condreni to fetch back some coarse cloth."

By the way, I ought to tell you that in Humulești the spinning was done by both girls and boys, women and men; and the village turned out many rolls of cloth and homespun grey wool which were sold, by the yard or made up into garments, to Armenian merchants who came for this purpose from other towns: Focșani, Bacău, Roman, Tîrgu-Frumos, and elsewhere. Our cloth was sold either in the village or at fairs all over the country. Several of the inhabitants of Humulești made their living that way. They were landless free peasants and itinerant merchants, dealing in cattle, horses, pigs, sheep, cheese, wool, oil, salt, and maize flour; cloth coats — big ones, reaching down to the knees, and short ones — tight trousers, white cloth trousers, nightgowns; carpets, either square with floral designs, or narrow runners; spreads made of local silk with woven patterns and sundry other things. These they took on Mondays to market or on Thursdays to convents, because the fairs were not easy for the nuns to get to.

"Well then, God be with you, aunt Marioara! I'm sorry cousin Ion is not in, for I'd have loved to go swimming with him".

But I said to myself: "I've done it. A good thing they're not in, and if they don't turn up soon, so much the better." To cut a long story short, I kissed my aunt's hand, took my leave like a dutiful boy, left the house and pretended to head for the bathing place, but by clever dodging one way and another I found myself in the good woman's cherry tree and started putting cherries into the front of my shirt, ripe and unripe, just as they came to hand. As I was anxiously hurrying on with the job as quickly as I could, I suddenly saw aunt Marioara, with a rod in hand, under the cherry tree!

"You devil, so this is your swimming place, isn't it?" she said, her eyes fastened on me. "Come down, you thief, and I'll learn you!"

But why should I get down when hell and destruction were waiting at the bottom of the tree? When she saw that I would not budge, two or three clods of earth came whizzing through the air at me, but missed. Then she started hoisting

herself up the tree saying, "Wait, you swine, you, she'll yet be the death of you, will Marioara, and pretty soon too!" Upon this I swung down on to a branch nearer the ground and all of a sudden I jumped right into some hemp that grew beneath the cherry tree; it was still green and waist high. That crazy aunt Marioara rushed after me, and I ran like a hare across the field of hemp with her on my heels to the fence at the bottom of the garden, but I'd no time to get over it, so I turned back, still across the hemp field, still running like a hare, with my aunt on my tracks, back to the cattle yard where again it was difficult to jump out, for there were fences everywhere along both sides and that miser of an aunt would not stop chasing me for the life of her! She very nearly laid hands on me! I went on running and she went on chasing, and between us we trod the whole field of hemp flat, and, truth to tell, there were about ten or twelve *prăjini* [1] of fine hemp as thick as a brush all ruined. And when we had done that bit of a job, my aunt somehow got tangled up in the hemp or stumbled against something and she fell down. I then suddenly turned around like a swivel, took a couple of running jumps, and vaulting over the fence without touching it, I doubled back to cover my tracks, went home, and was very good for the rest of the day.

But later that evening, along came uncle Vasile, with the mayor and the watchman, calling my father to the gate. They told him what had happened and summoned him to attend a hearing of the case and pay a fine and damages for the hemp and the cherries, for, if the truth must be told, uncle Vasile was a tight-fisted fellow and as much of a miser as aunt Marioara. As the saying goes: they were like the two halves of an apple. It was not much use my saying anything. A man's work is his own concern. The evil was done, and he who bore the blame had to pay. As the saying goes, it is not the rich, but the guilty who pay. And so father paid the fine for me, and that was the end of that. And when he came back shamefaced and hurt from that restitution, he gave me the very grandfather of all hidings and said:

"There, take your fill of cherries! From now on, mind you, you've no more credit with me, you rascal! Do you think I'll go on paying more damages on your account?"

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[1] *Prăjini* (sing. *prăjină*): old Moldavian square measure of about six yards by two, i.e. an oblong strip of twelve square yards.

And that's how it was with the cherries; mother's word, poor dear, had come true too soon: that God will not help him who steals. Yet what good is remorse after death? And my own shame to boot! Just try to face aunt Marioara if you please, uncle Vasile, cousin Ion, or even the boys and girls of the village for that matter, especially on Sunday in church, at the *hora*[1] where it's lovely to stand apart and look on, at bathing places or in Cierul-Cucului[2], this being a meeting place for lads and girls who had been pining for one another throughout the week, while at work.

Believe it or not, I had made such a name for myself by the pranks I had been up to that I could hardly show my face outside for shame, and this was just at the time when a few pretty girls were growing up in the village and when my heart had begun to flutter somewhat. There's the saying:

"Hey Ion, are the girls dear to your heart?"

"They are."

"And you to their hearts?"

"So they are to mine!"

But what can you do? It, too, will pass with time; nothing for it, but to grow a thick skin and let sleeping dogs lie. It's been the same with many another trial that I've been through in life, not just matters of a year or two with a definite beginning and end, but recurrent troubles lasting several years, as one's turn comes around for grinding at the mill. And after all I did look out, in a way, lest I walk into some sort of trap, but the very devil seemed to prompt me and I would stir up trouble in plenty.

Even after the cherry business a new trouble arose.

One morning mother woke me up with the greatest difficulty saying:

"Get up, you lazy boy, before the sun rises, or do you want the Armenian cuckoo to poop on you so that everything will go wrong with you all day?" This was mother's way of pulling our legs about a hoopoe that had been nesting for many years in an old hollow lime tree, up the hill by the house of uncle Andrei, father's younger brother; and every day in summer at daybreak you'd hear it call-

[1] *Hora*: Romanian folk dance.

[2] *Cierul-Cucului*: place-name, a fenced-in grazing place for horses.

ing : "Poo-poo-poop ! Poo-poo-poop !" so that the village re-echoed. And as soon as I got up mother promptly sent me off to carry rations into the fields where we had some gypsies hired to tend the maize, at Valea Seacă, near Topolița.

No sooner did I set out with the rations than I heard the hoopoe singing : "Poo-poo-poop ! Poo-poo-poop ! Poo-poo-poop !"

Could I stick to my course and leave it alone, I ask you ? Not me. I went round by the lime tree, bent on catching that hoopoe for I was fed up with the thing, not necessarily because of the pooping, as mother said, but because mother would wake me every day before sunrise on account of it. And as soon as I came level with the lime tree, I left the rations on the path at the top of the hill, climbed quietly into the lime tree that very nearly soothed you to sleep with the scent of its flowers, slipped my hand into a hole in the tree that I knew of and what luck ! I felt the bird sitting on its eggs and I said to myself delightedly : "Sit still, my pretty, for I've got you at last ; a fat lot of pooping you'll do from now on !" And just as I was about to pull the bird out, I don't know how it happened, but I took fright at her fan-like feathery crest, for I hadn't ever seen a hoopoe before, and I let go of her, and she fell back into the hole. And as I sat there telling myself that there weren't such things as feathered serpents — for I had heard tell that snakes were sometimes found in holes in trees — I took courage and again slipped my hand inside to get the bird out, come what might, but she, poor creature, had vanished for fear of me somewhere into the recesses of that hole, and I couldn't find her anywhere. "My word ! what a strange thing to happen," I said angrily, taking off my fur cap and stuffing it into the hole ; I then climbed down again, looked for a slab of stone of the right shape and size, climbed back with it up the lime tree, took my cap and put the stone instead, thinking that the bird was sure to come out from wherever she was hiding by the time I'd got back from the fields. Then I climbed down again and set out at a good pace to take the victuals to those gypsies. But no matter how fast I walked, time had not stood still while I'd been frolicking about goodness knows where, fussing and messing about in that lime tree to catch the bird ; and the gypsies, it goes without saying, had grown wild with hunger, while they were waiting. There's a saying that goes : When hun-

gry, a gypsy will sing, a gentleman will walk up and down with his hands behind his back, while a peasant will smoke his pipe and smoulder within himself.

So it was with those gypsies of ours; they were singing like mad upon that patch of land, leaning on the handles of their hoes, their sight dizzy with so much scanning of the distance to see whether their food was coming. When lo and behold! about midday, there I was, coming out from behind a knoll, the food ice cold and I uncertain whether to approach them or not, as I listened to them singing so merrily. All of a sudden the dragons were upon me and would have swallowed me whole, if it hadn't been for a young gypsy woman among them who stood up for me:

"Hey, stop it! Why do you go on at the boy? It's his father you've got a quarrel to pick with, not him!"

Thereupon, the gypsies, forgetting me, started to eat without another word.

As for myself, having thus saved my face, up with bag and dishes and back to the village. I walked around by the lime tree again, put my ear to the hollow and heard something flapping about inside; then I carefully removed the stone, slipped my hand in and pulled the hoopoe out, quite exhausted from so much struggling. As to the eggs, when I tried to lay hands on them, they were all just a squashed mess. After which I went home, tied the bird by the leg with a piece of string and kept it out of mother's way for a day or two, up in the loft, among the discarded wooden tubs; and every now and again I would go up to see the bird, so that the whole household wondered what I could possibly be doing so often up in the loft.

But the very next day after this, along came aunt Marioca, wife of uncle Andrei, foaming at the mouth with anger and started quarrelling with mother on account of me:

"Now, did you ever hear such a thing, sister-in-law. Just fancy Ion stealing that hoopoe that has been waking us each morning for so many years!" my aunt was saying plaintively. She was thoroughly upset and could hardly keep her tears back as she said this. I can see now that my aunt was absolutely right, for the bird had been the village clock, but mother, poor dear, had no inkling of what I had been up to.

"What's this you're saying, sister-in-law? I'd thrash the life out of him if I found out that he had caught the hoopoe

to torture it. It's a good thing you've told me; leave it to me and I'll talk to him and worm the truth out of him."

"Don't you have any doubts about that, sister Smaranda," aunt said, "for nothing is safe from that little devil of yours. I've been told by people who saw him take it that Ion's the one who's got the bird. I'll bet my life on it!"

I was hiding in the pantry, and as soon as ever I heard what they were saying, up I climbed into the loft, snatched the bird from where it was hidden, jumped down with it under the eaves and made straight for the cattle market to sell it, for it was Monday and market day. As soon as I reached the fair I began to walk up and down among the crowd, hoopoe in hand, for I wasn't a merchant's son for nothing. Now a foolish old man with a heifer at the end of a bit of rope had nothing better to do than to ask me:

"Are you selling that birdie, sonny?"

"Yes, indeed I am, sir."

"And what will you take for it?"

"Whatever you think it's worth."

"Come, let's have a look at it and see what it weighs!"

No sooner had I handed it to him, than the mean wretch, pretending to feel it for eggs, gently loosened the string around its legs and threw it into the air, saying: "Bad luck, it's slipped out of my hand!" The hoopoe with a whirr of its wings landed on the roof of a booth and, having taken a short rest, flew off to Humulești, leaving me open-mouthed and in tears, gazing at it! I then clutched at the old man's coat to make him pay for the bird.

"What do you think you're up to, old man? Being so free with a man's goods? If you didn't feel like buying it, why did you let it go? You won't get away with it, mind you, not even with that heifer of yours. Have you got that straight? This is no joke, you know." And I stared the old man in the face and made such a racket that people crowded around us to see the fun; it was better than a comedy.

"I say you are a tough one, my boy!" said the old man after a while, laughing, "why in Heaven's name are you carrying on like that, sonny? Now you want my heifer for an Armenian cuckoo? It seems to me you're asking for a damn good hiding, you little brat, and I'll give you one, if that's what you want. I'll lay into it so hard, my young fellow, that you'll thank your lucky star when I'm finished with you!"

"Leave the kid alone, old man," said a man from our village: "he's the son of Ştefan, son of Petrea, a man much respected in our village, and you'll get into trouble with him over this."

"Jolly good luck to him, my good man; do you think I don't know Ştefan, son of Petrea?" the old man said. "I saw him just a moment ago walking about the fair, with his measuring rod under his arm, looking for cloth in the usual way of business. He ought to be around, or in one of the booths making a bargain. Glad to know whose son you are, kid. Just wait a minute and I'll take you to your father and see whether it was his doing that you came to sell hoopoes and make fools of us at the fair."

All was well so far, but when I heard about father my spirits sank, and so I made my way slowly through the crowd and rushed off to Humulești, looking over my shoulder to see whether the old man was after me; for, truth to tell, I was now anxious to get rid of him. You know the jest: Leave him alone, man! I'd gladly do so, but he won't let go of me now! That's just how it was with me, and, what's more, I was glad to have got off so lightly. "It would be a good thing if I could carry it off half as well with mother and aunt Măriuca," I thought, my heart thumping in my chest like a hare's with fear and weariness. When I got home I found that both father and mother had gone to the fair. My brothers and sisters told me in great terror that there was a fearful to-do with uncle Andrei's wife, and how she'd roused the whole village because of the hoopoe in the lime tree, and how she was saying that we'd taken it. She had made it very unpleasant for mother. Aunt Măriuca, you know, is one that will worry the life out of anyone; she's not easy to get on with like aunt Anghilița, wife of uncle Kiriac, and that's a fact.

And as they were anxiously telling me this, what should we hear but the hoopoe singing in the lime tree:

"Poo, poo, poop! Poo-poo-poop! Poo-poo-poop!"

My sister Catrina then said in amazement:

"Listen to that, brother! My word, the way some people accuse a man when he's quite innocent!"

"You're right there, sister of mine!" But I thought to myself: "If you only knew what she's been through, poor thing, because of me, and what I've been through because of her, you'd weep for that bird!"

Zahei had left us at it and had gone to the fair to give mother the joyful news about the hoopoe. And the following day, it being the Tuesday before the feast of Saint Peter, mother baked an ovenful of cheese cakes and cheese pies, also roasting some tender chickens on the spit, and then frying them in butter. About noon time she asked aunt Măriuca, uncle Andrei's wife, to come to our house and said to her good-naturedly :

"My goodness, sister, how people argue over nothing, by lending an ear to evil tongues ! Be seated, sister, and let us rather partake of the good things that God has granted us, and drink the health of our husbands with a glass of wine :

May all evil from us go,
May the good things ever grow,
Vanish from us strifes and cares,
All our land be free from tares !

For if a woman were to work herself into a state about every little thing, she'd go stark raving mad in no time !"

"You're quite right, sister," aunt Măriuca said, shrugging her shoulders quite perplexed, as she was preparing to sit down to the meal. "Did you ever hear of such a thing ? That's what comes of believing everything you're told."

Then we all began to eat. I don't know about the others but I do know that I ate enough to last me for the rest of the day.

And as soon as I got up from the table, I said goodbye to the food and made straight for the bathing place ; I dived in boldly from a steep bank into the swirling water and I came to the most awful belly-flopper flat on my stomach, and I saw a blaze of sparks in front of me from sheer pain. I thought my belly had burst and no mistake. I scrambled painfully out of the water and sat upon the bank hugging my stomach and the boys gathered around me and buried me in sand and said prayers for the dead over me as best they knew. It was about an hour before I came to my senses. After that I began to bathe at my leisure until sundown. Managing to get home with the cows, I told mother that our cows had run loose from the cowherd's enclosure about noon and that I had taken them grazing, on my own,

and that's why I was so late. Mother, like a good Christian, always seeing the bright side of things and accepting the explanation I had so favorably presented, praised me for my prowess and, moreover, placed a meal before me. Eating like a wolf, I pretended to be humble and laughed up my sleeve, all the while, wondering at the skilful lies I had been telling her, so much so, that I half believed them myself.

That's how a person may often be taken in when he least suspects, if he can't reason things out, but on the other hand, experience is the mother of wisdom.

One day, close to the festival of Saint Elijah, mother was up to and over her eyes in work. There was cloth to take out of the looms, another lot to warp and begin weaving, a heap of coats cut out and waiting to be tailored rose up to the ceiling, the wool combs lay in the chest without anyone to use them, the wheel stood in the middle of the room, and there was no coarse for weft!

And as the saying goes: No sense in waiting, for your luck stands still. What with bobbins to spool, a baby in the cradle and some five or six children waiting to be fed, she had her hands full and no mistake. The work had to be done quickly too, for the fair at Fălticeni was almost upon us and that was the real thing, the most important fair of the year.

Mother woke up earlier than usual and said to me very lovingly: "Your father's gone to cut those oats, for they're shedding their grain upon the ground, and I myself have more than enough to do, so don't go wandering along the roads, but stay at home with mother to make spools and rock the baby, and at the Fălticeni fair I'll buy you a hat with a ribbon around it and one of those bolts with pockets in them, the sort you've always wanted."

"Right you are mother!" But I alone knew what was in my heart. I may not have been much good, but when it came to sewing and embroidering cloth coats, and particularly to spinning, I was every bit as good as the older girls; and that's the reason why that wicked Mărinuca, daughter of Săvucu, whom, by the way, I did not dislike, would often tease and mock me, nicknaming me "Ion Torcălău"[1] which was the name of a gypsy from Vinători. Despite that,

[1] *Torcălău*: Belittling, ridiculing nickname, derived from the verb *torc* 'I weave'.

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she was dear to me, however, and I would spin in her company, in the shade of their walnut tree, and each of us would produce such a mound of thick spun wool that mother would give me a kiss when I showed it to her in the evening at home.

Thus we boys and girls would call upon one another, taking our work along for the sake of company, which is called in the country "şezătoare"[1] and it's generally held at night, each one doing his or her own work. So deftly were we spinning that it was a delight to Mărîuca and I, each trying to outdo the other, and as the spindle was spinning so my heart spun within me for the love of her! God is my witness! And I remember that one night at a corn husking party I caught a mouse in her bosom that would have sent her into fits, poor child, if it hadn't been for me.

And in summertime, who but me should be walking the countryside, on holidays, keeping the girls company across fields, upon hill-sides, in those glorious water meadows and coppices, gathering oleaster to make yellow dye, marjoram, honey-balm and common melilot to lay among the clothes? Like the burden of the song:

Make of me, Lord, a lime infusion
To throw the girls into confusion!

To put it briefly, wherever there were three people I made the fourth.

But when I heard about rocking the baby I didn't take kindly to the idea at all, though the misfortune of being the eldest had fallen to my lot. But what could you do when it was your mother asking you? That day, however, when she'd asked me, the sky was so blue and it was so warm and lovely out, that you felt like bathing in the dust, like hens. Seeing such weather I bolted to the pool, though I knew it meant leaving my mother in the lurch, my own dear mother, worried as she was. I must tell the truth, for God above sees all!

After a while, thinking I was somewhere in the orchard, mother came out and began to shout herself hoarse: "Ion! Ion! Ion!" But there was no trace of Ion. Not getting any answer, she left her work undone and followed in my tracks to the waterside where she knew I was in habit of going;

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[1] *Şezătoare*: "spinning party".

and there I was lying naked in the sand, as big a lout as ever was. Then I stood up holding a sun-baked stone with silver spots in it to each ear and I hopped now on one leg, now on the other, bending my head fixed to the right, then to the left, saying these words :

Spots of silver, spots of gold,
Take the water my care hold !
And I'll give you coins of old ;
If you do, I'll clean your churns
And I'll beat your drums by turns.

With that I threw the stones, one by one, into the deep pool in the river where I bathed, one for God and one for the Devil, dividing them equally between them ; then I threw a few more to block the devil, foaming at the mouth as he was, at the bottom of the pool, then, splash ! in I would dive to catch the devil by the leg, for that was our way of bathing, and had been ever since Adam's time. After that I would dive in three more times in succession for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and a final one for Amen. Then would I gently edge myself up the bank like a great sturgeon and lie by the side of the water, slyly peeping at the water playing around the lovely legs of some girls who were bleaching linen upstream. I don't think there ever was a lovelier sight !

Poor mother her arms folded across her chest as a body will stand when worried, was looking on from behind a heap of gravel, quite close to me. But being so busy I couldn't see her.

Half an hour must have gone by with mother standing there, three or four more half-hours since I'd left the house and I was beginning to feel the sun right inside my stomach, as they say, for it was past noon. Yet in that state, beguiled by happiness, I was well lost to life and the world.

Mother, though a long-suffering woman, finally lost patience and came gently on tiptoe from behind, as I was contemplating those girls that I've been telling you about ; she quietly picked up all my clothes from the bank and left me naked in the water, saying bitterly :

"You'll come home, you tramp, when hunger gets the better of you and then you'll dance to another tune." And away she went.

"Well, well! what are you to do now, Ion!" The girls who were busy bleaching their linen and who had observed this scene, nudged each other in the ribs and giggled at my plight so that the place resounded with laughter. I wished the earth would swallow me up, and the worship of a while ago had now changed to a desire to strangle them, more or less. But as the saying goes: You can't stop wind or water, and people will talk!

I let the girls laugh themselves silly until their mouths stretched from ear to ear, and biding my time until they were bent double, bleaching the linen, I shot out of the water and took to my heels: and I ran so fast upon the gravel that the stones I touched shot up as high as I was tall. Faster, faster I ran without ever looking back, until I came to the road that led to our house. But I wouldn't turn into the road, being ashamed of meeting people, and instead I jumped into Costache's garden and crawled on all fours through the maize, then I jumped into a lane, from that into Trăsnea's garden and again through the maize-stalks, and, just as I was coming out of Trăsnea's, the dogs scented me and came at me as if they would tear me to pieces. What was to be done? I had heard people say that to stop dogs biting you and to get rid of them, you should crouch down the moment you see them springing upon you and let them bark as long as they like, lying silent; then they'll bark a while and leave you and go their ways. And that's a fact, for that's how I got rid of Trăsnea's dogs on this occasion when they were after me. It was amazing that I was not caught by that great hulking villain Trăsnea, who had borne me a grudge ever since the time when he had caught me stealing his best apples and summer pears in his garden, for he'd have beaten the life out of me, and that would have been the last straw considering the plight I was in! At last when Trăsnea's dogs gave up, as I've told you, I jumped into a crossroad and thence into our garden, and then I felt as if I were safe in Abraham's bosom. I walked without a care in the world across the maize garden until I reached the yard, I peeped through the palings and caught a glimpse of mother working hard, both indoors and out, and my heart bled for her; and it bled, too, for my own belly, exhausted with swimming as it was. As the old saying goes: I'm sorry enough for you, but sorrow for myself

quite breaks my heart. Unable to bear the pangs of hunger any longer, I began to whine humbly behind the palings; "Mother, I've come home." And all of a sudden I dashed into the yard, stood before mother in my birthday suit, caught hold of her unwilling hand, and kissed it, saying to her, whining all this while: "Mother you may beat me, kill me, hang me or whatever you will with me, only give me something to eat for I'm nearly done for!" As the saying goes: Nakedness goes round about; hunger hits the nail on the head. At which she, with a mother's kindness, looked tenderly upon me and said with a sigh:

"A fine thing for such a great big, idle fellow to walk the country in such a state and leave me right now with no help at all! Come and have something to eat, but mind, I've had more than enough of you. Maybe if you behave yourself from now on, I might have the same feelings for you as before, but I can't honestly make any promises."

To cut a long story short, seeing that I was on mother's bad side, I swore to her that I'd never behave like that again. Then I was as good as gold to her, never doing or saying anything to upset her, for a kind word will do a great deal. I did the household chores as industriously as could be; I tidied up and cleaned the house as well as my capable girl, so that mother had no need to worry when she went out. And one day she gave me a kiss and said with great tenderness:

"May God grant you happy days, Ioniță, my dearest, and may he shower upon you His most precious gifts, if you keep on as you've been doing recently!"

All of a sudden I found myself crying for sheer joy. I was more sincerely sorry than I had ever been before. Had mother thrashed me with every paling in the fence, had she driven me out of the house like a stranger, I should not have stood before her as contrite as I was at her gentle words.

And don't you believe that I didn't keep my word. I did, for as long as I could manage, since that was my nature, patient and steadfast in my speech, but, after my own fashion. Nor is this self-praise, my deeds will speak for me: I didn't ask for food when I was asleep; when I was up I didn't wait for others to give me; and when there was any work to be done, I made myself scarce. And that was not

the sum of my accomplishments. If I was treated roughly there was nothing to be got out of me. If I was treated gently, that worked even less; and when I was left to myself, I made such a fine tangle of things that not even St. Nastasia, who can save you from poison, was able to unravel it with all of her skill. As the saying goes: One fool can throw a boulder into a pond, but ten wise men cannot get it out.

After all, what's all this talk about? I've had my share in this world like everybody else: a clay figure endowed with eyes, a handful of animated humus from Humulești, who was never handsome in his teens, wise in his twenties, nor rich in his thirties — but yet, as poor as in this year, and as poor as last year, as poor as since the day of my birth, I have never been!

III

"I wouldn't mind it so much if you were of some importance or if you came from anywhere noteworthy," my better self said to me: "but as things are, though you're a mere figure of clay endowed with eyes, a handful of animated humus from Humulești, you will not keep quiet, but still batter people's ears with your boorish sayings!"

"I will not, conscience of mine, for I am an ordinary normal man, born of two people, and the village of Humulești, where I first saw the light of day, is no out-of-the-way, joyless village, with no outlook on the world like some other villages, and the places around our village deserve to be remembered too. Above Humulești, there is Vînătorii Neamțului where the ancestors of those men who had fought against Sobieski, the King of Poland, still live on. As you go further north, are the monasteries of Secu and Neamț, once the chief glory of the church of Romania and a second treasury of Moldavia. To the south, you've got the villages of Boiște and Ghindăoani, where people will only harness Hungarian oxen, no less, to their carts; where the plows will stand unguarded in the fields for weeks on end, the beehives will need no beekeepers, the cornfields no watchman, and not a thing will be taken; and the people in those villages know nothing of lawsuits. Close by Boiște is the village of Blebea, more than half of whose inhabitants, if they drop their fur caps into the water will say: "That's for father, God rest his soul!"

To the southwest you have the convents : Agapia, and hidden away from the world, Văratec, where Brâncoveanu's rich and charitable wife spent her life ; and the village of Filioara, with its deer trails trodden by those girls who run away from the nunnery, Bălțătești, famous for salt, and Ceahlăești, Topolița and Ocea, where the people chase the crow away from their land after it has got the plum in its beak. Up north beyond the waters of the Ozana, there's Tîrgu Neamț and its outskirts : Pometea under the Cociorva Hill, where every house has a large orchard ; Țuțuieni, whose people have come from across the mountains, who eat rancid lard, are forever looking after their sheep and weaving the wool, and are famous for their oil presses; Condreni with its watermills on the Nemțișor and its felt mills for cloth. Above the Condreni, upon a steep wooded slope, stands the famous Castle of Neamț in its wild countryside, where the lightning plays in summer and where the cattle with the fly upon them graze, watched over by the rooks and the hawks who've found it a good place in which to build their nests. But that's no concern of mine, a son of Humulești. My task lies elsewhere : I wish to give an account of our village, and of the boyhood I spent there, and then make an end.

All the princes and metropolitans who have succeeded each other upon the throne of Moldavia since this country began had to pass through Humulești at least once, on their way to the monasteries, to say nothing of other people who've journeyed through our village, wealthy, select people, visiting the monastery of Neamț and its icon that works wonders, its bedlam, its patronal festival on St. Ispass's Day, when there's a fair going on in town at the same time. Humulești was also on the road to various fairs such as Piatra on Whit Sunday and Fălticeni on St. Elijah's Day ; to patronal festivals at Secu, the beheading of St. John the Baptist, at Agapia on the Hill (Veche), the Transfiguration of Our Lord, at Agapia in the Valley, Saints Constantine and Helena, and at Văratic, St. Mary's Day. An endless stream of people ! All the sanctifyings and dedications of churches ; all the synods and the replacements of clerical and political personalities ; all the strangers from the world over, all the hearts urged on by unfulfilled aspirations, all the broken and misguided souls that found their way to the monasteries, all these brought people through our village. People, people, an endless stream

of people. Foreign armies and a troop of soldiers on horseback, all highranking Germans in gold-embroidered cloth, they all went through Humulești in the days of my boyhood, with drawn swords, making for the convents to look for beautiful Natalia : and they made a great to do in the convents and ransacked all the cells of the nuns. but could not find her ; for the cellars of Pârvu. the watchman at Tîrgu Neamț, could hide a young princess. in time of need And it was a good thing the nuns were there and that they knew how to appease them with gentle words, persuading them to put away their swords by telling them that those who draw the sword shall perish by it.

But why should I bother my head with kings and emperors, instead of thinking about my boyhood at Humulești and of seeing to my own troubles ? That's what I ought to have done from the start, but I was anxious to prove that the people of Humulești do not live like bears in their lairs, but have the happiness of seeing all sorts and conditions of men.

In 1852, on the day when the chapel of the hospital at Tîrgu Neamț was being consecrated and the Prince's school was being opened, I was one of several boys who had a part to play in the church service, and we stood near Prince Ghica who was present at that ceremony with a whole throng of people around him. We could not take our eyes off him ; and he, good-looking and gentle, seeing us all arrayed in embroidered shirts as white as ermine, fine sleeveless sheepskin tunics. tight trousers of the finest wool, and wearing our sandals, all neat and clean and with our hair well brushed, with modesty written upon our faces and the fear of God in our hearts, gave us a fatherly look saying :

"Now children, you have a school and a holy church, fountains of consolation and spiritual happiness ; make good use of them, cultivate your minds and praise the Lord !"

These words spoken by those princely lips imprinted themselves deeply upon the hearts of the people present there, and without delay the school was soon filled with boys who were anxious to learn, myself among them, excelling everyone in pranks and laziness ; I'd grown so lazy that my equal was nowhere to be found, because mother wouldn't let me so much as fetch a tubful of water in her anxiety that I should study and become a priest, like Father Isaiah Duhu, our teacher. Father Duhu was a kind man when he was in the right mood, God rest his soul ! He kept the boys in such

order as had never been seen before. In summer, out of his own money, he would buy baskets of raspberries and all kinds of fruit, for us to eat. Practically every Saturday he would pack the lot of us into a lumbering old coach belonging to the Neamț monastery and would take us to the abbot's lodgings to be examined in the presence of abbot Neonil, a crippled old man who gently advised us to stick to the book of prayers and the psalter, for all other reading, he used to say, was mere heretical learning which rather tended to trouble and embitter man's soul. Yet it was written that Father Duhu should not follow the advice of the holy abbot to the letter, but that he should teach us a bit of arithmetic, grammar, geography, and a little of everything according to our understanding.

One day, Father Duhu returned in a fury from the abbey and set us the following problem to illustrate the rule of three:

"If one penny wrongfully deducted equals a hundred rightfully earned ones, then how many honest pennies are there in six thousand lei, my yearly salary, that unlawfully been withheld by abbot Neonil and which the monastery of Neamț will eventually be made to pay?"

"Twenty-four million pennies, Father, or six hundred thousand lei," one of us answered, chalk in hand, at the blackboard.

"I want Nică Oșlobanu to check that sum," said Father Duhu.

Nică Oșlobanu, a great, big lumbering fellow got up, as usual, and begged to be excused since he had a headache. And I don't quite know how it came about, but a big 'bear' tumbled out of the front of his shirt and rolled upon the floor; not a bear like the gypsies train to dance at fairs, but a round ball of mămăligă, with cheese inside it, cooked over live coals, and just the thing to put in your stomach when you're hungry. The boys made for it, and Oșlobanu dived in the middle of them to get it back; there followed such a scuffle and such laughter in the classroom because of that 'bear' like you've never seen before.

At this I can picture Father Duhu in my mind, slapping his forehead and saying with the most enormous sighs:

"It's my great and grievous sins that have driven me into this place to teach these savage bumpkins! You'd have been a thousand times happier, Isaiah, grazing pigs at Copoasca

Veche than living to see such days ! And you, Oşlobanu, you stupid lout, a slave to your belly and taking no trouble whatever over your mind, you won't be a priest like your father before all the monks at the Neamţ monastery have turned hermits."

Oşlobanu, stupid though he was, it was better to leave him alone because if they didn't he'd begin pawing the dirt in front of him, like a bull. As soon as he got home that evening he told his father what Father Isaiah had been saying. The rest could be left to Father Niculai Oşlobanu, who didn't know very much, rushed through three services every day, and prayed for the souls of the dead wholesale, so that monks and ecclesiastics, abbots and metropolitans, with their wives and children, would be turning over in their graves.

One morning what did Father Duhu do, but take Teofan, another monk from the chapel of the hospital with him and go to the church of Saint Lazarus below Castle Hill. No sooner did they enter the church than they started picking a quarrel with Father Oşlobanu who was officiating, because he wouldn't stick to the ritual.

"Ritual, you hypocritical pot-bellies ? I'll give you ritual, that I will." Father Oşlobanu said, putting saintliness aside. "By cunning machinations you stole the Holy Martyr Demetrius, Fountainhead of the Holy Ointment, from us, and instead of this renowned saint you have given us Lazarus, a ragged Jew, who keeps on dying and resurrecting and resurrecting and dying again, until no one will pay heed to him any longer. And that's a patron saint, is it ? Moreover, having left us penniless by taking away our lands and putting a wall around the church, you now close the gates of the hospital too, just to spite us ; they've even stopped our bells from ringing because of those hounds, the doctors. It's your doing, too, that the parishioners have dropped away one by one, so that not even a bleary-eyed hag ever drops in anore ! And what's more: for sixty years and over I've been serving the church and you're to teach me the ritual now, you vipers, are you ? Just wait and I'll drive those lofty notions out of your heads !" And whistling through the air at the monks' heads came the great Ecclesiastical Code. Then, catching up a sturdy brass candlestick, he was at their heels to put a curse upon them ! And just then Father Duhu and Teofan dropped thar slippers, quickly crawling out on all fours rather than running, as the ritual designates !

The next day Nică Oşlobanu didn't come to school ; nor did Father Duhu ever go to St. Lazarus's, for Father Oşlobanu would have had him nailed on the cross and stored in the church loft, side by side with some of the icons left over from Neamţ Castle.

And I guess that the old man was quite right : for on the spot where St. Lazarus's now stood there had once been a church built in wood, dedicated to Saint Demetrius founded and endowed with lands by Prince Vasile Lupu [1], just like ours in Humuleşti. But the Neamţ monastery in its shrewdness, when building the hospital at Tirgu Neamţ, rebuilt St. Demetrius church of stone, changing its patron saint, calling it Saint Lazarus's, and included it in the precincts of the hospital by surrounding it with a wall, and Saint Demetrius became patron saint to the hospital chapel ; while they swallowed up the ecclesiastical lands, as well as the Humuleşti lands. And so it was that the wrath of Father Oşlobanu had reached its peak ; no trace of a monk would he allow in his church ; he'd sooner have them skinned alive ! Father Duhu had narrowly escaped being turned into a martyr, to replace Saint Demetrius, the fountainhead of the Holy Ointment !

Shortly after this we heard that Nică Oşlobanu had gone to the seminary at Fălticeni, would you believe it ! My cousin Ion Mogorogea, Gîtlan, Trăsnea and other acquintances of mine had gone there already, at their parents' expense, of course. As to myself, now left without any friends to get into mischief with and, moreover, having received a good thrashing from Father Isaiah for no reason at all, I would nag mother to talk with father, so that I might go to the seminary as well, although I was such a mischievous boy. The young clerics were supposed to bring as an offering, to the Reverend Principal at the 'priest factory' in Fălticeni gold coins, beehives, sheep, horses, oxen, and similar things, to be turned into coins for his treasury. Then you could rely upon His Holiness and be sure to come away with all the necessary clerical learning. But in my case, father gave just two measures of rye and two of oats to those in charge to enter me at Fălticeni. Schooling was just a manner of speaking ; bribery was the thing.

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[1] *Vasile Lupu*, Prince of Moldavia, 1634—1653. A renowned patron of Orthodox culture, he was also responsible for building the Trei Ierarhi Church in Iaşi.

Upon reaching the place late in the autumn, I took lodgings with Pavel the cobbler, in Rădășeni Street, where my friends were quartered.

The principal who used to play cards until all hours, rarely came to the school. We students, seeing this, went still more rarely, yet there were plenty of scrapes and pranks.

Pavel was a bachelor and his house was roomy enough. There were benches and beds all around the walls, with one more by the stove, and they were all taken. Our host, after working the whole day through, would take it easy upon the stove, among boot tress, shoemaker's lasts, sole extenders, a shoemaker's table, knives, sharp double-bladed knives, sleeking-steels, straps, pegs and wedge-shaped pieces of leather, needles, prongs, tongs, files, shoemaker's hammers, boot-trees, leather, thread, a broken plate with green vitriol, cobbler's wax, and all things necessary to shoemaking.

Bodringă a shiftless old man, but full of fun, was also staying with us. For a bit of food and some cheap tobacco, the kind that's sold for six pounds a penny, he would do the chores for the whole household : he would saw wood, light the fires, fetch water, sweep the room and tell us stories all night long, crouching with his nose almost into the embers. He would play the flute too : the *doina* [1] that sends shivers down your back, the *Corăbiasca*, *Mărioța*, *Horodinca*, *Alivencile*, *Tutura*, *Ca la ușa cortului*, dancesongs [2], and many more such jigging ones as these ; and we would dance until the floor would sweat and the soles of our boots would wear out, and the heels too, for I was also wearing boots now. And with that sly waggish old man Bodringă around, Pavel could hardly manage to mend all of them. What's more, he too, once in a while, took leave of his senses, and made a mess of his own boots dancing with us.

Once, it was Oșlobanu's turn to buy firewood, and despite his utter meanness, he went out into the empty field near our lodgings and came upon a peasant from Sasca, I believe, or from Baia, with a cart loaded with beech-wood boards.

"How much do you want for the cartload, my dear sir?" said Oșlobanu, who had as little intention of buying wood as I now have of taking orders.

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[1] *Doina :* Romanian peasant song, lyrical and nostalgic.
[2] *Corăbiasca,* etc. : names of popular songs and dances.

"Three 'husăși', young man."

"You don't say so, dear sir! So much for an armful of wood! I could have that lot on my back and carry it home at one go."

"If you can carry that, young man, I'll let you have it for nothing."

"Do you mean what you say, my good man?"

"I'm not joking, young man; we'll see if you can carry it, and then you're welcome to it."

Oșlobanu then took the logs out of the man's cart one by one and balanced them on his shoulder, then he undid the belt that was wound around his waist and put it around them, binding them neatly so that they would not come apart, then lifting and heaving with some difficulty, he got them on his back and went home with them!

A impudent boy who was looking on said in a loud voice:

Beadle,
Needle,
Be-he-he!
The devil take ye!

The peasant meanwhile stood crossing himself open-mouthed without so much as uttering a word.

Now I can't tell you exactly how heavily loaded that cart was with wood, which in the market was worth seven and a half lei at that time of the year, nor how big and strong Nică Oșlobanu was and some sixty more lads like him, many of whom having left their wives and a couple of children in some forsaken mountain village, had come to Fălticeni to thrive upon booklearning.

A fine place for learning that was, without a doubt! Some would drone church tunes, putting on airs, you know:

Ison, oligon, petasti
Două chendime, homili[1]

until they were as hoarse as crows; others would blurt out the seven mysteries in the great catechism in one breath, with their eyes closed. Gîtlan would fight with Goliath the

[1] These words have been left in the original, because they are in the text as much for their sound as for any sense they may have.

giant in his sleep. In less time than it took him to make Ms mamaliga, that bewhiskered David of Fîrcaşa would finish reciting at full speed without stumbling the whole history of the Old Testament, divided into periods, by Filaret Scriban, and the conjunctive pronouns in the dative and accusative according to Măcărescu's grammar book : *Mi-ţi-i, ni-vi-li, me-te-il-o, ne-ve-i-le ; me-te-il-o, ne-ve-i-le, mi-ţi-i, ni-ci-li,* whatever that may be, dash it all ! Some boys would mumble like mad until they were dizzy, others would never stop bellowing it out, until their eyesight grew dim, some would move their lips as if reciting some passage as a punishment, most would walk about distracted or stand around thinking, seeing how they were wasting their time, and they would just utter a deep sigh, knowing well all the hardships in store for them at home. For such maddening of brains and twisting of tongues as these unhappy seminarists were put through, I never saw the like. A terrible way to make you go insane, God alone knows.

It was a real pleasure to look upon young David, that young lad from the mountains with his forked beard and his fine sideburns, his curly hair as black as a raven's feather, his high, pure brow, his bushy eyebrows, his large eyes, as black as mulberries, flashing like lightning, his ruddy cheeks like two peonies ; tall of stature, broad in the shoulders, slim in the waist, pliant like a birch tree, he was as light-footed as a doe and as timid as a girl. God rest his soul ! It was not his lot to take orders ; he died, poor fellow, before his time, smothered under the conjunctive pronouns, may they never more be heard of, for they ate alive that very jewel of a young man ! Far more sensible was Mirăuţă of Grozăveşti, who would loaf about in the bitterest cold of winter, calling at every Jewish booth, for fun : he would ask for a straight sheath for his curved pruning knife, or for a halter for fleas, or even for nails out of Noah's Ark, or wild or cultivated strawberries for someone who'd gone out of his mind ; or he would sing to spite the Jews :

The beetle I can just abide
That munches beech leaves far and wide ;
The caterpillar is a brute :
It kills off every tender shoot
And does not let them reach a height
To shelter lads and lasses bright !

And many more such devilish things that came into his mind. He wasn't such a fool as to waste his strength upon *mi-ţi-i, me-te-il-o, ne-ve-i-le,* as young David had done.

Like Mirăuţă, I wouldn't take as much trouble to kill myself with booklearning; no children were crying for me at home, nor had I given the headmaster such a great premium.

Two bushels of rye and two more of oats were no reason for my refraining from consoling the priest's daughter at Fălticenii Vechi.

What's more, when I looked into the mirror, there wasn't a whisker on my face, though I would singe it and rub in a mixture of tallow, burnt wick and burnt hood every night, but it was to no avail. For the truth of the matter was that anyone joined that sort of a school it was only a long beard and a large purse, what a curse, that could make your step into clerical shoes!

As to Trăsnea, the trouble he had with grammar, the poor soul! He once said to me in deep despair:

"I say, Ştefănescu," (that's what they called me at Fălticeni) "let's stay away from school today, for I don't know the multiplication table and I want to learn the grammar for tomorrow. Please, please come along with me, out to Fălticenii Vechi. We'll study together or each on his own: I'll do grammar and you whatever you want, and then you'll question me and we'll see if some of it has stuck in my poor head. That won't do anything about the other subjects as I can't cope with very well, what with this new alphabet[1] that's come in, but this damned grammar is turning my hair grey, curse it, I wish it were burned to ashes! What's the use of it in church anyway? However it's in the syllabus. I'll begin at the beginning, and maybe with your help, since you've been through Father Duhu's school, I'll get the hang of it."

At Fălticenii Vechi held some special attraction for me. I agreed with Trăsnea and off we started. A dry frost had set in, in the month of November, and there was a certain wind that day that set your cheeks afire! As soon as we

[1] Trăsnea is referring to the change-over from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet.

reached the fields, Trăsnea lay down on a footpath and started on the grammar right at the beginning, first question, first answer.

Question : What is Romanian grammar ?

Answer : It is the art that teaches us to speak and to write a language correctly.

Or, according to another edition :

Grammar is a discipline that shows us how to speak and to write a language well.

That's that ; from prayer book and psalter, which we passed through poorly enough, we passed on to grammar, and what grammar ! Not like the ones we have today, a whole lot of grammars, some 'rational', some 'fully developed' and chockfull of 'compliments' which, we must say, without flattery, *do* explain... so that you no longer understand a thing; these are expressly conceived for children and child's play they are too, they're so easy ! But what's the use of talking about them ? No such luck for Trăsnea to deal in choice methods. No, poor devil, he had to learn another sort of grammar : "art, correct, in a language ; a syllable is a complete sound, simple or compounded with one of the consonants, or with several consonants, which is nevertheless uttered in a single emission of breath." While in a different edition : "By a syllable we understand the utterance of a part of speech, etc." [1]

Wel, well ! Now clear your voice and do your best, brother Trăsnea, if you can. On the third page there's another piece of nonsense :

Question : How many divisions has Romanian grammar ?

Answer : Romanian grammar has four divisions which are : 1. etymology, 2. syntax, 3. orthography, 4. prosody.

Question : What does each division teach ?

Answer : 1. Etymology teaches us the parts of speech, that is grammatical analysis. 2. Syntax teaches us to join words according to the spirit of our tongue, that is grammatical synthesis. 3. Orthography teaches us to write well, that is according to grammatical rules. 4. Prosody teaches us

[1] These inaccurate and primitive definitions are further complicated, in the Romanian original, by the old-fashioned and fluctuating spelling at that period of linguistic transition. The fun and the irony are thereby enhanced.

to stress the syllables and to pronounce them according to the nature of the words and of the intention we have in uttering them.

Then came *mi-ți-i, mi-vi-li, me-te-il-o, ne-ve-i-le*. And more ridiculous inventions.

Now if you consider that Trăsnea was advanced in years and somewhat hard of understanding, and that the teacher, who would himself wonder at his being a teacher, used to say: "Take it from here, down to here," as I believe they still do in some places to this very day, then, maybe, you won't be so hard on the grammarian, or on the teacher, or on Trăsnea, but on the accident that makes people the way they are: either steel blades or tin ones. And do you think Trăsnea would read question and answer, in turn, slowly and distinctly so that something intelligible could come of it? Not so, you pagans, but this way: "What is grammar, Romanian, it is... what is, it is... art, no art; art... art... which... which... which teaches us; teaches... teaches... what does it teach; ...what does it teach; to speak... eak... eak... that teaches...; what is, is... is art, the devil! not art, the art that teaches... what is, is..."[1] And over thus, mumbling at great speed, stuttering and never stopping to think for a minute; he would seldom reach "to write a language correctly," poor fellow! When he'd completely addled his brain, he asked me to listen to what he knew. Then I'd take the book out of his hand and ask: "What is grammar, Trăsnea?" And he, shutting his eyes would blurt out quickly and mournfully, like a beggar at a bridge:

"What is Romanian grammar, it is... what it is, it is..." and the rest followed in the usual muddle, words distorted and strung together with no sense whatsoever, so that you felt like weeping with compassion.

"That's not right, brother Trăsnea."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Don't say Romanian, but just give the answer; what do you repeat the question for?" And he would, in his way, make an effort to give a good answer, but it was no use, he got more and more tied up, began to heave sighs, and felt like knocking his head off.

[1] The fun poked at the difficulty of pronouncing words unfamiliar to the peasant, and of stressing syllables aright, is illustrated by the various deformations of the word: *arta, artea, arata*. The English word *art* being a monosyllable, the humor of the Romanian text cannot be rendered in translation.

"Leave me alone a bit," he would say sorrowfully; "and when I call, come back and question me again: and if I still don't know it, then I'll be damned! Now let's admit I'm no good at grammar and let's put it aside; art the same, to say nothing of 'Romanian, is... which... teaches us to speak and write well in a language' which are, I suppose, Romanian words, the devil they are! Only there must be some snag here, too... 'to speak and write well in a tongue.' Devilish this! How can you 'write in a tongue'? Perhaps it means with the tongue, how should I know? It seems probable that the likes of us are hopeless when it comes to writing, but even when it's just a matter of speaking, more's a pity, it looks as if we spoke in a paganly fashion and as bad as could be; not Romanian, but some God-forsaken dialect. Good God, a man who writes grammars must be full of learning! Yet in grammar, as far as I can see, the table they call a table, the house a house, and the ox an ox, as I've learnt to call them at my mother's knee. Maybe the other horrors like pronunciation, art, correct, to pronounce, the analysis, the synthesis, prosody, orthography, syntax, etymology, concrete, abstract, conjunctive, *mi, ți, i, ni, vi, li: me, te, îl, o, ne, ve, i, le,* and the likes of these may be pure Romanian, and we country bumpkins have no idea of them! It's a lucky thing we haven't to sing them, for it would be even worse for our weak, useless brains! Better dead than be a peasant! Get along with you, Ștefănescu. I'll set to it again."

Leaving him to his own devices I went to the priest's daughter, found her alone and in a mood for company, and we had some quiet fun together until nightfall, for she had no mother, and her father, as was natural for a priest, was making the rounds, begging for what he could get.

I then went back to the fields, the ribbon from around the girl's neck in my pocket, a beautifully embroidered handkerchief with silk flowers, and a fine supply of apples in my shirt; and what do you think? That fool Trăsnea was asleep on the path, the grammar book under his nose and never minding the cold. "Poor, foolish man! a worthless knave you are, this won't do; it would have been better if your mother had born you a colt for the wolves to have eaten," I said to myself.

"Hey! Trăsnea! Get up! Do you know the multiplication table?" Up he jumped, I listened to him, but he knew

nothing. "Come, let's go back, Trăsnea, old chap, for I'm dying of hunger, frozen and sick at heart in this ghastly field!"

"Same here. Damn that grammar! I'm fed up with it. And besides that I am not feeling well."

"A sort of laziness and weakness in the knees, isn't that it, Trăsnea?"

"You've got it exactly; a kind of faintheartedness with weakness in the knees or thereabouts."

"Maybe it's the grammatical fever," I suggested.

"Worse luck! Maybe that's it," said Trăsnea; "for damn it, as soon as you take it up, you're sleepy. Such stuff and nonsense won't affect the ritual of the church and that's a fact. The '*Osmoglasnic*'[1] is the thing. As father was accustomed to saying: 'the song of praise fills the bag, the hymn of thanksgiving fills the barn, my boy!' Why bother and worry about grammar, Ștefănescu? Come on!"

And we went to our lodgings, about sunset; we ate our fill and then asked old Bodringa to play for us; and, from everywhere around, a crowd of clerics swarmed in, for that was one of their favorite meeting places. We became so involved in our dancing, you know, as one should at that age, that we didn't even notice the night passing. And so I got rid of my worries and of Trăsnea mumbling in his sleep: "What is Romanian grammar... it is, what it is..." as he did other nights. But the jolliness did not end there, something better was added to it. Old Bodringa had hardly put the pipe to his lips when in came Father Baliga, nicknamed corn stalk, from Buciumenii Street. He had already taken a sniff of burnt incense and a sip of holy water or something stronger, though it was early, God forgive him! And as soon as he had made the sign of the cross over us, with both hands, as his custom was, the way archbishops do, he forthwith came out with certain illusions concerning the priest's daughter at Fălticenii Vechi: that she was a good girl, that she'd be a fitting wife for a priest, that she'd be very good for me, that her father would betroth her to me. Father Baliga, the old troublemaker, carried on with these until Gîtlan started flattering him and saying:

[1] *Osmoglasnic*: book of church singing, with eight modulations specific to the Greek Orthodox ritual.

„Come now, leave it, good Father, don't go about spreading such fantasies at the very beginning of Shrovetide. Go on playing, good man Bodringă, for a while and let's have our fill of rejoicing, then Father Buligă will absolve us all!"

Old Bodringă took the hint; he began to play again, and the dancing went on.

Father Buligă, though an old man, seeing how things stood, lifted up the skirts of his robe, tucked them into his belt and said:

"As far as I'm concerned, may God grant you fun and good cheer, as long as you live!"

Then he threw his kamelavkion[1] aside, and danced as enthusiastically as the rest of us, so that his strands of hair were all aflutter with the swing of the dance. We went at it over and over again until he very nearly gave out. We exhausted him so much that he was quite fed up with us. But, as the saying goes: If you join the dance, you must dance it out! The poor man seeing that he'd joined a pack of fools, began to think of excuses to get away.

"I'm a spiritual father to some parishioners who're expecting me, dear boys, and whether living or dead, I'll have to go, for that's our calling."

Then Pavel, our host, suddenly placed a dish with some cold meat and sausages and a jug of wine in front of Father Buligă, and said:

"Please, holy Father, come and share our meal. Take a bite and one or two glasses of wine, and then you'll be ready to go if, as you say, there's such a hurry."

His holiness, making no attempt to resist, joined his hands according to custom, cleared his voice, and humbly said:

"The Lord's blessing upon the food and drink of His servants, amen! Then he raised his glass saying: "May you be bursting with health like a lush green forest, my boys, here's to you! When we are at our worst, may it be always as it is now!" He emptied his glass down his throat, then two or three more and on top of those some others. After that he again gave us his blessing with both hands and said:

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[1] *Kamelavkion*, Romanian *potcap*: clerical head gear of an Orthodox priest.

"Now boys, you've had enough, so be quiet!" Then he left us to our own devices and went his way. Yet we went on to say:

What says the doctor? Let him say!
As for the priest he shall have nay!
Enjoy yourself to your heart's content,
And you'll be still more on pleasure bent!

About nightfall we all, including old Bodrîngă, went to a respectable tavern belonging to the daughter of the mayor at Rădăsani, where most people came out of love of the hostess than for any urge to drink wine; and lovely she was, too, a blessing upon her! She had recently married a widower, an old man; such a stick in the mud and just the sort of person you want for a host. The moment she saw us, the hostess welcomed us and showed us into a large room with shutters on the windows and a wooden floor, where there were only ourselves and the hostess, whenever she cared to look in.

In one corner of the room there were a few bushels of beans, in another hemp seed, in a third corner a heap of fine apples and Rădăsani pears, that will keep over winter until after Easter, in the fourth, peas and broad beans divided by a wide plank and nearby some Turkish pumpkins, dried pears in a wooden tub, as sweet to the taste as figs, further on a heap of reels of hemp and flaxen thread, hanging from a rafter a coil of worsted and yarn with many colours, for carpets and runners. Then oak-tubs, rombings, and sundry things dumped on shelves and corner cupboards as was usual in the house of a well-to-do farmer in these days. As soon as we were all assembled in that delightful room, the hostess closed the shutters, lit the candle, and in no time at all was back with a large earthern jug full of Odobești wine; and as she poured it into the glasses its bubbles shot up into the air, it was so strong. Gîtlan, the sly one, took up a glass and handed it to the hostess saying:

"Come, honey, you drink the first toast and we will see if you put something in it or not."

The lovely hostess raised her glass, and with laughing eyes wished us health and happiness and, having tasted a little, begged us not to detain her for she had other customers besides us, and her husband couldn't manage without help.

But have no fear ; we barred her way and insisted that she should take a sip from each glass. And she would have stayed longer, I'm sure, had we not stupidly driven her away by thanking her with a loving kiss from each of us.

"That's the way of youth, bless them," old Bodrîngă said, as he sat perched on the heap of combings and munching dried pears : "It's as it should be, boys, it's your time now or never."

"Right you are, good man," said the hostess coming in at the door with a dish of hot pies and a roast chicken that she set before us ; and, my word, what a blessing that was, for we were as hungry as wolves.

When we had finished drinking one jug, another would arrive for which we again gave thanks by kissing the hostess until she would pretend to be angry and run away from us. Then she would come back and run away again, for that's the way they sell the wine everywhere they sell it. How in the name of sin should I know what was on her mind ? Maybe the hostess took no offence whatsoever to our company, that's why she'd try it so often. At long last, Trăsnea, that nasty lout, took her by surprise and gave her a smacking kiss. Any ass will soon put his foot in it. And then the lovely hostess was really cross. But what could we do ? As the saying has it : She'll doff her anger in the same blouse she took it. For there is no other way out of it. After a while, old man Bodrîngă took heart and began to play one of those Corabiasca dances that set your feet tapping. And didn't we warm up to it ? We danced so crazily that the room wasn't large enough for us. We plunged into the beans, peas, and broad beans, as though we were blind and the hemp seed was all squashed into oil under our feet. It was after midnight when we saw that old Bodrîngă had left us and we slipped out, one by one, making for our lodgings ; myself with a load of dried pears and a large pumpkin that the hostess had given me ; for she was as openhanded as she was lovely, the little darling ! But when I reached our place what did I see ? Nearly every one of my companions had borrowed some little thing ; one of them, magnificent apples, another, Rădășani pears, old Bodrîngă had picked up an armful of combings to set the fire burning, Trăsnea's choice was hemp seed. Now Oslobanu, whose boots had their uppers cut out of one cow's hide and their soles out of another, was bringing up the rear, and, when he got inside, he lay

down upon his back, shod and dressed as he was and raised his feet up to the rafter in the ceiling, until he was standing on the back of his head and you'll never guess what happened next. A good tubful of beans, and no mistake, ran out of the tops of his boots, which he usually wore turned down and which he had turned up for this special occasion! My cousin Ion Mogorogea alone, son of an honest farmer, had taken no keepsake, while Zaharia, son of Gîtlan, had been content with kissing the lovely hostess. A great consolation for a young stranger at Shrovetide! And I now see that Gîtlan, whose name in school was Zaharia Simionescu, proved the wisest of the lot; for he shared in the goods we'd brought; but we'd had no share in his happiness!

There's a time and a season for all things and now we got down to our books for a while, for the Christmas holidays were hard upon us and we were taking the bread out of our parents' mouths for no purpose: you can't get anything for nothing and money does not lie on the road for the taking. Putting our goods together, we now possessed at the beginning of Advent some four or five jugs of oil, three or four sacks of corn flour, a few pounds of salt fish, prunes, beans, peas, broad beans, salt, and enough wood to last for some weeks; for we took our meals together, taking turns at cooking, each using his own supplies, for the day. But Oşlobanu, who ate as much as seventeen set us all to thinking. His old man, father Neculai, could have sent him plenty, no doubt; yet a bird in hand is worth two in the bush.

There are many things to do and little talk is needed if you're with someone who understands you. One day I talked it over with Gîtlan, arguing that something ought to be done to get rid of a few hearty eaters, because the partnership didn't seem fair. We found a way of solving our problem that could not be improved on. At night when they were all asleep, we would apply 'posts' to the feet of whichever person we'd choose; it was easy to do as some of them would drop off and sleep like logs as soon as old Bodrîngă began to tell his tales. Having agreed on our plan, we waited for a time when the others were absent and started making enough 'posts', to last us for some time. They are made from a few sheets of paper stuck together with tallow, which we melted at the fire. You gently apply one to the sole of a man's foot, when he's asleep; then put a match to it. A holier thing than this isn't possible! Since

feelings ran high against Oşlobanu, his turn came first. And when the flame burned him to the bone he jumped from his sleep, roared like a bull and couldn't keep still because of the pain. Yet, unable to discover the culprit, and not relying upon his strength to fight us all, he fell on his knees and touched the ground with his forehead, calling God's wrath upon us, curses pouring out of his mouth. Despite the cursing we applied a few more 'posts' on succeeding nights and since his soles had become one big sore, he had to go haste back to Humuleşti, sick of the priesthood and leaving all his provisions behind in our hands. Upon which Gâtlan wrote to Oşlobanu :

Beloved Oşlobanu,

Good health to you from the empty stomachs you've left behind. If you haven't enough to eat where you are, do come here that we may fast together.

Always wishing you the best,
Zaharia
Captain in charge of the posts.

A few days later we cured Nică, the son of Constantin, son of Cosma, from Humuleşti, who had only recently joined us in our lodgings, of the taste for the clerical calling. He too went back the Oşlobanu way with blistered soles on his feet. And so much the better, for they were wasting their time anyway.

Trăsnea, however, tougher than the others and slow of understanding, stuck it out as long as he could ; then seeing that we'd got the better of him with those 'posts' he moved into new lodgings taking his share of provisions. After he left only three of us remained at Pavel the shoemaker's : myself, Gâtlan, my cousin Ion, nicknamed Mogoroga, and old Bodrîngă, of course. My cousin who had seen the plight of the others made it a habit to sew up the sleeves of his fur coat every night before going to bed, and to stick his feet in them. He slept without a care in the world, thus illustrating the dictum : Caution is the mother of safety.

Close upon Christmas Pavel made a pair of Muscovy leather boots for my cousin Ion, with whom he was very

good friends. Mogorogea had paid Pavel two *icusari* [1] for the boots. But they were worth it, without a doubt; for he'd used good leather, they were double soled and they were made to measure. The only thing Pavel had forgotten to put in was the squeak [2], and Mogorogea had been much upset at that. Luckily the winter was bitter cold and the snow remedied the omission.

During holidays we used to go home and then it was a case of the gypsy saying, "Christmas, the time for stuffing yourself." Smoked pork chops, boiled sausages and haggis, dried sausages seasoned with garlic, thin slices of bacon, all home made, chopped and properly fried in the pan; eaten with warm mămăligă, they would just glide down the throat like anything. A peasant will make a lot of tasty dishes, if only he has what he needs to make them. And thanks be to God, our parents had that; for poverty had not settled on their doorstep at the time I'm speaking of. But on with my tale: we kept Christmas properly with our parents at Humulești and after Epiphany we went back to Fălticeni, to Pavel, our landlord. We called at the school just occasionally, as a matter of protocol, but, truth to tell, there was no point in going there; for what's in the book you may learn on your own, if you are so inclined, and if not, then, good luck to you! And I was one of the fortunate ones: for when it comes to faith, what's the use of booklearning? Old Bodringă, I'll agree, had a lot to teach you. His pipe would set you dancing against your better judgement and his tales would not let you go to sleep. Besides, there were other things to pass the time should we feel so inclined: darts or some card game or other; or sometimes, at night, we would sit up talking until daybreak. On holy days we would make our way to the villages where we knew there was dancing. At Rădășani, a large, pleasant and wealthy village, we danced at three different horas [3] on the same day: one hora of staid bachelors where the youngest girls had turned up; a second one of young fellows to which the older and more interesting girls had come; and a third one, of youngsters joined by whoever wished to join in. The young men

[1] *Icusar*: Turkish coin.

[2] Boots that squeak call attention to their newness and thus gratify their owner's pride.

[3] *Hora*: country dance, danced in a circle.

would hardly move and the hora swung very slowly. The girls would not wait to be asked, as they do elsewhere, but would each undo the hands of two young men, where she thought fit, bid them "good day" and go on dancing. My cousin, flaunting his new boots, would only dance next to the mayor's daughter, a sister of the lovely innkeeper's wife at Fălticeni. Whereupon Gîtlan who was dancing by me, whispered into my ear :

"You wait and see what I'll do to Mogorogea ; if he doesn't rue this day, I'll be damned !"

"Be quiet, man, and don't be a fool," I said, "for he may get upset and go back home like the others."

"So what if he does ? Good riddance ! As the saying goes : If the old woman steps out of the cart, it will only be all the lighter for the mare." And we danced on.

That night we went back to our lodgings, and Mogorogea, a neat careful fellow, cleaned his boots and placed them by the stove to dry, as he always did. Three days after that my cousin's boots split all over. Thoroughly furious, he had it out with Pavel, asking for a new pair or for the money back right away.

"You've been using overdried leather, you clumsy cobbler," said Mogorogea angrily, "is that the kind of friend you are ? Come now, make your choice, or I'll ruin your good name. I'll throw these boots at your head, do you hear ?"

Pavel being quite blameless answered scornfully :

"Look here, young cleric, don't go too far, because you can't carry it off. Who are you calling a clumsy cobble ? Now that you've been wearing the boots a long time, running around with your rowdy friends, wearing them to pieces at dances, kicking them up hill and down dale, now you'd like me to give you your money back, or make you a new pair, would you ? Not bad, that, I will say ! Aren't you satisfied with all the trouble I took putting those damned shoes of yours on lasts, stretching them on boot trees, and rubbing oil into them here on the stove, under my very nose, each morning ? And the time you stuck 'posts' to my foot, too, and I, like the good-natured fellow that I am, kept quiet and put up with it all ! You're an impudent young fellow, I'm sorry to say ! But, if you want a fight, I'm your man !"

"So that's what you think, you bungler !" my cousin said. "You're actually trying to talk yourself out of it ! Yours aren't the only boots I've worn, so I know what good boots

are, you feeble idiot. And you're insulting me, as well. I'll give you such a hiding that you won't enjoy another meal as long as you live !"

"Before you give me that hiding, I'll hack you to bits with my shoemaker's knife, see ?"

Observing that they were about to come to blows, we intervened and with great difficulty calmed them down. It was agreed that Ion was to give Pavel another "irmilic"[1] while the latter was to mend his boots and forget about the quarrel.

They would sometimes crack a joke after that, but it went against the grain and Mogorogea couldn't get over the insult he had suffered at Pavel's hands.

During carnival week[2] uncle Vasile came to Fălticeni and among other foodstuffs he brought to his son were three fine young pigs, all prepared and ready for roasting.

"Welcome, father," Ion said kissing his hand. "So you found us all right, did you ?"

"Glad to find you in good health, my boys," uncle Vasile answered. "They say that the blind found the town of Suceava all right, so how should I have missed you ?" Then after talking about this and that, he asked us the direct question : "And what's the opinion of the Board concerning your ordination ? is he going to let you finish soon ? For, truth to say, I've had enough of so much worry and expense."

"You don't call him a Board, father, but the Reverend Principal," Ion said, a bit uncomfortable because of his father's ignorance.

"There, there, your Highness ! as if that's what I'm worrying about, now. As we say : it's not the master, but his man ; but like master, like man and they're much the same. And if it comes to that, why not call things by their names ? Be it Board or hoard, winning or skinning, or whatever its name, son ; what I do know is that he's really giving me the shaft," said uncle Vasile. "They say that a priest has four eyes ! Better pray and implore the holy St. Nicholas of Humulești to help you into the priesthood ! Then you'll find yourselves without any difficulties ; you've no taxes to pay, nor offerings in kind, at dinners you're the

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[1] *Irmilic :* same as icusar, a Turkish coin.

[2] *Hîrți* or *cîrnelcagă* (lat. *carnem ligat*) : week between Christmas and Epiphany when meat is allowed even on fast days (Wednesdays and Fridays).

head of the feast, and eat pies and roast chickens, and you'll get paid, too, for blunting your teeth. You know the saying : If a priest had horse's legs, a wolf's mouth, a thick skin and a mare's belly, he'll want nothing else. It would be a good thing, God's mercy upon me, if church dignitaries were somewhat different ! But you will have heard that a priest's hand will grasp rather than give away ; he thrives upon the living and upon the dead. Just look at the way the Board lives, no hard work like ours. However, grace must be honored. I've already found a kamelavkion for you, son," uncle Vasile said, when he was going. "Try not to procrastinate, but lay hands on that certificate as soon as you can and come home, for Ioana, daughter of Grigoraș Roșu in our village, is looking forward to being a clergyman's wife. Farewell to you both, Zaharia and my nephew, I'm going."

"Farewell uncle," we said seeing him some distance on his way ; "and please tell our parents that we're in good health and our thoughts are with them."

When uncle Vasile had gone, I gently put it to Ion :

"Cousin, let's roast one of those piglets tonight ; I'm dying for one !" Mogorogea, stupid and mean as he was, began to shout at me :

"Now listen, you two ; I'm no Nică Oșlobanu that you should make a laughing stock of me. As you feed me, so I'll feed you. Not a bite of these piglets will you eat, not if you were dying of hunger."

"And if we don't get any, may he starve who talks in that way !" said Gîtlan.

"Amen," I added, half-heartedly.

"And I'll join in," Pavel said from behind the stove.

"Amen or no Amen, you just take your mind off the piglets," said Mogorogea nastily, "is that clear ? You're always after delicacies, well, you'll do without them and you won't be the worse for it !"

"Leave him alone, chaps ; may those piglets choke him in the next world !" said Zaharia.

And we started working at our books, Heaven help us ! Yet, if the truth be told, we felt no more like working than a dog feels like licking salt. A mighty fire had been burning in the stove ; we raked it together and covered it up, for there was a frost outside. Old Bodrîngă had got tied up somewhere or other that night and Pavel, having no work to do, had turned in early. While Mogorogea, his thoughts fixed on

that kamelavkion of his father's, had gone to sleep before Pavel, his feet safe within the sleeves of his furred coat as usual, and was now snoring away. You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours, the old saying goes.

A bit later we put out the light and went to bed, only we couldn't fall asleep for thoughts of that piglet.

"Zaharia, don't you have any of those 'posts' anywhere ?" I said under my breath.

"No," Zaharia answered even more softly, "and Lord, what a good thing it is for Mogorogea. Here's the best I can suggest. Take my knife, gently cut the sewing of Mogorogea's sleeve under his foot, singe it thoroughly with these matches that burn without flaring up, and he'll have no pleasure from those piglets, I assure you. But watch out and be quick about it."

"Give me that knife," I said, "and whatever happens I hope you won't let me down and won't allow him to beat me !"

"No fear of that," said Zaharia, "singe away and don't worry !"

Then I took my courage in both hands and did just what Gîtlan had advised me to do. Gently cutting through the stitches, I applied as big a bunch of matches as ever you saw to my cousin's heel, where the skin is thickest, until he felt the burn. Suddenly he roared as loud as could be. Away I leaped, matches and all, and slipped behind Zaharia's back. We both started snoring as if we'd been sleeping for goodness knows how long. Meanwhile Ion, his feet tied up in the sleeves of his fur coat, had fallen flat on the ground, writhing around like a snake and cursing us with any curses that came into his mind :

"Damnation ! God damn you, you filthy swine, you ! There's no getting a wink of sleep, in this house, because of the likes of you ! Who played that trick on me ? Zaharia and Nică, I hear them snoring and I don't think they would dare. It's that thief, Pavel, who's done it, may a gadfly suck him dry when he's in his sweetest sleep ! There he is, pretending to be asleep too ! The devil ! Let me just teach him to make a laughing stock of people !"

With that he took a live ember from the fire and got up on the stove by Pavel. And as he was lying on his back, poor man, fast asleep, Mogeroge a put the ember on his chest saying :

"There, that's for the fun you've had with me, you miserable cobbler!"

A fearful roar went up and at the same time Pavel, pounding the stove with his feet broke it to bits. In the sudden confusion that ensued, finding himself face to face with Ion, a savage struggle broke out between the two of them, and there we were with ringside seats, if only we could have sat it out.

"Stop that, Zaharia, or there'll be murder in this house and we'll have to answer for it," I said, shaking like a leaf with fright.

"Hey you! what's come over you?" said Zaharia springing between them like an eagle. "Do you call this a decent man's house?"

I, meanwhile, rushed out of the house weeping, and began to shout as loud as I could to summon the neighbors. People jumped up on all sides, heavy with sleep, thinking there was a fire or that soldiers were murdering us, God forbid! For there was a German army quartered at Fălticeni at that time.

When the racket had subsided, people left us as they'd found us and went back to their houses, cursing and swearing at us. You should have seen the shocking state the house was in, everything thrown around, windows broken, the stove dashed to the ground, handfuls of hair torn out of their heads, and blood upon the ground. Pavel burnt in the breast and Ion, nursing his burned heel, sat on one side, panting; Zaharia and myself on the other, amazed at what had happened. While, as for the innocent piglets, staying in the lobby to keep cool, I never knew what happened to them. Zaharia wishing to put an end to the silence, said after a while:

"Sing to them, Ion: 'Hallelujah, those righteous of the world' and give up yearning for them; it's plain that was their destiny, poor little dears!"

"Won't you shut up," said Ion, bursting with anger. "You've never stopped talking about them, and now you've had your way with them."

At this point old Bodrîngă came back, a little drunk, and began to cross himself as soon as he entered the door.

"Well, good man," I said, "what do you think of this? Do you like it?" Pavel, who had so far sat without uttering a word, looked around sorrowfully and said:

"Look here, you clerics; to put an end to all these problems get out and leave me alone!"

Relieved to get off so lightly, we took what was left of our belongings and moved to a blacksmith's, taking old Bodrîngă, our only consolation, along with us.

During Lent a rumor spread among us students that the seminary would be closed and that the younger ones would be transferred to Socola.[1]

"There's a good one for you, as good as ruin," said Trăsnea, "once you're nearly there, you find you've missed your way. As they say: We're done in, horses and all. It must have been the devil himself prompting me to bother my head over grammar. Had I known, I might have stayed at home, and all the money that has been spent like water, father could have put to better use."

"Same here," sighed the married seminarists, "we've spent our last farthing; gold coins, sheep, hives, horses, and oxen, too, they've all gone, swallowed by a hungry wolf; the Reverend Principal, a long life to him!"

"Stop it, brothers," Zaharia replied. "Money is the very devil and that's a fact! Why be so hard on the poor man? As if he were the only one! And as to you, really, you are hard to please. Have you never heard the saying: Come up in the wagon! Not on your life! Come up in the carriage! Not on your life! Come, let's walk! Not on your life! Rather say, that you're going back to your own kind as water finds its level. I for one am glad for this change. To Socola we should go, if we want to be turned out full of learning. They've got the most learned teachers in the world there, I've heard."

"To Socola we'll go," the younger students shouted.

"Go to the dogs, if you wish, like greyhounds unleashed!" shouted the older ones.

And thus, close to Easter, we broke up and went our ways, on the understanding that whoever wished to join the school at Socola would do so the following autumn, in the year 1855.

Bucharest, September, 1881.

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[1] Socola: district in the town of Iași, capital of Moldavia, famous for its monastery and its lunatic asylum.

IV

As the mountain bear will not leave its lair, as the peasant from the hills will not move to the field, nor the babe be taken from the mother's breast, so was it hard for me, even with all my mother's pleadings, to leave Humulești that autumn of the year 1855, when the time came for me to go to Socola. And why wouldn't I leave Humulești for the world, when my mother kept telling me that it was for my own good? This is the reason why: as God would have it, I was no longer a boy, alas! And the town of Iași, that I had never seen, was not close to Neamț, like Fălticeni, from where in the late autumn or during the Christmas holiday, when the nights were long, I was able to return home from time to time. I would slip away about vespers and walk apace on moonlit nights with my friends, going to the nightly gatherings at Humulești, walking posthaste all the way like coach horses. After dancing a while, we were accustomed to stealing a kiss from some of the more flighty girls, and vanishing from the village before daylight, we would be back at Fălticeni about lunchtime. On each of the journeys there and back we would wade across the ford barefoot, opposite the Baths, the river Moldova being frozen along its banks so that the very marrow within our bones would be numb! But our hearts were warm for whatever we planned would come true! From Neamț to Fălticeni and from Fălticeni to Neamț was just child's play for us in those days.

But this was a different story: the short distance of two post-miles [1] from Fălticeni to Neamț was a totally different thing from the six long and tiresome post-miles, neither more, nor less, from Iași to Neamț. Nor am I just trying to be funny when I say that from Neamț to Iași is the same distance exactly as from Iași to Neamț. Far better for you to stay here, Ion, my boy, I was thinking in my simple mind, than weep unconsoled and wither away longing for the love of someone only I know! Yet there is a saying: A bear will not dance of its own accord. There was no choice open to me. I had to do what my mother was urging, I had to depart, whether I liked it or not, and leave behind all I loved!

Dear to my heart was our village with the smooth flowing crystal-clear Ozana, wherein the Neamț Castle had sadly

[1] *Post-mile*: distance of about six miles between two mailcoach stations where horses were changed.

been mirroring its face for so many centuries! Dear to my heart were father and mother, brothers and sisters, and the youngsters of the village, my youthful companions, with whom on frosty winter days we had had such fun sliding and sleding on the ice; while in summer, on holidays, when the weather was fine, singing and shouting, we'd scour the woods and shady glades, the banks where we sunned ourselves, and the bathing places, the fields and the crops, the plains with lovely flowers and the stately hills from beyond which dawn and hope would beckon at that lusty time of youth! I loved, too, the nightly gatherings, the evening working sessions, the dances, and all the village merry-makings, wherein I joined with the utmost zeal! Even if you had been a block of stone, you couldn't have sat still when you heard Mihai, the fiddler of Humulești, walking the village in the dead of the night with a crowd of young fellows in his wake, singing:

Tender leaf of springtime green,
In the hours of darkness keen
A nightingale within the glade
Sang as sweet as any maid,
And so moving was her tone
That the leaves would flutter down;
Sad and tender was her strain
To those who'd ne'er meet again;
Sighs and trills she ceaseless makes
Piercing deep the heart that breaks.

So many were the songs the fiddler would sing and play upon his sweet-sounding fiddle! and so many the other merry-makings in the village, that the whole year seemed like one long holiday! Which reminds me of an old woman's saying: God's blessing upon us and a yearful of holidays, and only one workday, and that a celebration or a wedding. And now you're thinking of leaving your village, my boy, with its charm and its beauty and going to that strange and faraway place, if your wretched heart will let you! And I tried very hard to make mother understand that I might pine and sicken for love of her, and even die among strangers, that my cousin Ion Mogorogea, Gheorghe Trăsnea, and Nică Oslobanu had given up study, and that they were still eating their bread in their parents' house for all that. But it was useless work! Mother had other ideas in her mind; she

carefully prepared all the necessities and eventually said to me in deadly earnest :

"Ion, you must always keep your good name and never abandon peace for strife ! You'll go where I say. Zaharia Gîtlan will go with you. Old Luca, our neighbor, is going to drive you in his cart, with his two fiery steeds. Come now, run along to his house and see if he's ready to go. For tomorrow at daybreak you're setting out, God willing."

"I won't mother, I'm not going to Socola, even if you kill me," I said, crying my eyes out. "People have lived and they still do without being ordained."

"It's no good whining, my son !" said mother quite unmoved. "It won't work with me. You know by now the way I am. Don't push me too hard or I'll fetch that stick from behind the chimney and put it across you, big as you are !"

Then she called father and said to him firmly :

"Tell this boy what he must be told, so that he'll stop wishing we'll change our minds, and get himself ready for his journey."

"There's no question about that," father said gloomily. "He'll do as we say, not as he wishes, for he's not independent yet. If that were my only care, good woman, I'd have no concern in the world. But how to meet the expense, that's what's worrying me, for money doesn't lie about, like firewood. These six or more besides him, who're staying behind, will they live on nothing ? Yet he, being the eldest, it's his privilege ; we've got to try and get him started, for you never know the sum of man's days ! And maybe someday he'll be a help to the others !"

Seeing there was no way of resisting their decision, I began to think of my departure, but sorrowfully reflecting in my mind : "I really am up against a brick wall ! Our village priests have never been through the Socola school and by the grace of God their belts won't go around their fat bellies ! As to monks, they're a bunch of lazy good for nothings from all the four corners, who've settled in those monasteries and to what heights will they not rise ? But when it comes to me, I have to go through so many schools : at Humulești, at Broșteni in the very heart of the mountains, at Neamț, at Fălticeni, and now at Socola, just to be permitted to become a miserable priest, with a wife and children ; really, it's asking too much !"

My first impulse was to tell mother that I'd become a monk at Neamț or at Secu, and with the amount of learning I had, or had not, I might, in a few years' time, become superintendent in some small monastery and lay next to a tubful of gold coins, such as Father Kirilaș, of Vinători Neamțului, ammassed from carting wood.

And then, holy Ilarie, you just take your flask of brandy, plenty of fresh caviar, and some more tasty morsels in your great coat pockets, stick your pistols in your belt beneath your monk's frock, and tilt your hat over one ear ; then armed with the sword of the Spirit, your long hair blowing about, you hurry off past 'The Evil Spot', towards the 'cursed Pathway' between Secu and Agapia-on-the-hill (Veche), where you can hear an angelic voice singing all summer :

Here I linger by the rill,
God's ewe lamb.

While some deep bass voice will answer :

There am I come from the hill,
God's own ram.

For being the miserable sinner that I am, quite unintentionally, I had discovered something of the monastic secrets, while I'd been walking with the boys during the summer, picking mushrooms in those places where I'd taken a fancy to monastic life, as a fellow steeped in piety always will, you know.

To go back to my story at last : the night before setting out I pondered in my mind until daybreak how I might soften mother's heart and go to a monastery instead ; and just as I had decided to tell mother these things, lo and behold, there's the sun ushering in a beautiful day. Old Luca, who was now married a second time and whose young wife had been anxious to wake him in good time, and get him ready for the journey, suddenly called outside : "Ready ? Come on ! I am waiting, horses and all." Mother then began to rush me into setting out, leaving me no time to tell her about my plans to become a monk.

To make a long story short, we and Zaharia's relatives gathered in old Luca's yard, kissed our parents' hands, saying goodbye with tears in our eyes ; and when we had climbed into the cart as sorrowful and tearful as could be, old Luca, our driver, whipped up the horses, saying to his wife who was shutting the gates behind us :

"Olimpiada, my dear, be careful of that hole!" It had been made by some pigs who, having broken down the fence palings in one place, had grown fond of the corn in his garden.

It was the morning of the Day of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist, as we drove out of Humulești; girls and young men, dressed in their Sunday best, were busily bustling here and there, with joy upon their faces! Only myself and Zaharia, squatting in old Luca's cart, were being driven into exile, forfeited to the devil! I can't think of a more appropriate and fitting term.

"Please drive on faster, good man," I said, "so that the village won't stare at us as if we were bears on show." But old Luca was driving in his own way, for his horses were singularly worn out, weak and scraggy like feeble kittens and no fiery steeds as mother would have it, doing her best to get me out of the house.

"A curse upon whoever's done away with those seminaries just when we need them." Zaharia Gîtlan said bitterly when we were out of the village. "Just when a man should be enjoying the days of his youth, he's got to set to booklearning; as if there were ten lives to be lived! Continually going from one school to another, all to no purpose, any day now we'll find ourselves turning into sickly, weak old men, just right for the priesthood, as soon we've finished at Socola!"

"What do you say to such goings on, good man?"

"What should I say, master Zaharia? What do I know of your regulations? I've got to drive you to the appointed place and from then on you'll manage as best you can. Giddy up, horses, so that we can be back home sooner."

As we heard old Luca lovingly speak of home and as we saw the villages and the lovely places we were leaving fall behind and new ones start appearing in front of us, our anger knew no bounds! Every well, stream, valley, glade, and other favorite place that we left behind drew a deep sigh from our chests! And if we had done as we then felt, we should have turned back there and then; only we were in old Luca's trust and we stood in awe of him as well as of our own parents.

After a brief halt at the bridge of Timișești over the waters of the Moldova, we drove on to Moțca and climbed slowly along past the woods at Pășcani. Then from the top of that wooded mountain we, unhappy souls, looked back once more, in sorrow, upon the Neamț mountains, these giants,

their tops hidden in the clouds, where streams sprang up, and from which swift rivers poured down, whispering secrets in their never-ending course and maybe carrying enough human yearning and pain along with them to drown them in the stately Danube.

"Well, well, Zaharia, old boy," I said as we were driving downhill towards Păşcani, "we've lost sight of the mountains now and our exile is a fact for God knows how long!"

"As the holy Lord will have it," said Zaharia, his voice almost gone. Then he sat brooding all the way to Blăgeşti, across the Siret, where we put up for the night. But what a night! Here, on the porch of a wheelwright's house we nearly went blind; from evening to midnight we lay in the smoke of burning dung, as if we were quarantined, yet the mosquitoes had the better of us.

"That's life in the plains for you," old Luca said, tossing and turning this way and that, as if on tenterhooks, because of the mosquitoes. "As soon as you cross the Siret, the water's bad and wood is scarce; in summer you're smothered with heat and the mosquitoes are a torture. I wouldn't live in the plains for the world! Ours are fine places! The waters are sweet to the taste, crystal-clear, and ice-cold, there's wood in plenty, in the summer it's cool and shady everywhere, the people are healthier, tougher, stronger, and more cheerful, not like those dwellers in the plains, withered and puckered as if they'd been living on toasted mushrooms all their lives."

"You know what, uncle Luca," Zaharia said after a time; "the Pleiades are setting, so is Orion, and the morning star is soon due; let's start on our way!"

"Right you are, master Zaharia; a Saint has spoken through your mouth. Rather than toss and turn on this porch let's shorten the journey. For God Almighty's in heaven and he will protect us from evil."

And so, after taking leave from our host, who was lying in the open, under another porch, away we drove.

As soon as we were out on the main road, by good fortune, we came upon some men with cartloads of shingles driving to Iaşi. We traveled with them for fear of the gypsies of Ruginoasa and we made splendid progress until, at daybreak, there we were at Tîrgu Frumos where we split a few watermelons to quench our thirst and satisfy our hunger. Then when the horses were somewhat rested, on we went towards Podu-Leloaei, and from there still further on to Iaşi,

more often walking than driving, for old Luca's horses had grown very weak and the peasants coming and going, who were fond of a joke, would make biting remarks, so that we were uncomfortable because of old Luca's shame.

And particularly about sundown, as we were just entering the town of Iași, along Păcurari Street, a devilish young lad mocked us outright saying :

"Take care, old man, hold those steeds in check, lest they gallop away, for this town of Iași is a large one and, for God's sake, don't wreak havoc in it !"

That was the last straw for old Luca : he poured out on him all possible and impossible curses.

"Just listen to that ! If he only knew, the lazy devil, where we'd started from last night, he'd hold his tongue ; he wouldn't talk like that about my horses, in that fashion ! And it's not the first time that I've been to Iași. I've no need to take advice from the likes of him as to the kind of pace I've got to go, damn and blast him ! If he'd just stopped a while, I'd have taught him to mock at travelers another time !"

Seeing that people were making fun of us and that old Luca was put out and angry, we crept under a rug as we were sitting in the cart, myself rather timidly saying : "Good man, if anyone asks you, from now on, why the horses are pulling so hard, just tell them that you're bringing some blocks of salt from the mines and see if they'll believe you !"

"So that's it ? I didn't know that you were that sort," old Luca said, walking by the horses bitterly enraged. "Don't provoke me or I'll beat you through that rug to get the devil out of you."

Hearing what was in store for us, we nudged each other in the ribs and almost bursting with suppressed laughter, we just sat mum. At long last, after much sarcasm which old Luca received on all sides, for people can be very nasty when you're driving at a slow steady pace, in and out of potholes, through all the bumps and ruts in the streets of Iași, we eventually came, late at night, to the yard of Socola ; and we drove under a big poplar tree where we found plenty of students from all the seminaries of Moldavia : some were young, but most of them wore great big unkempt beards like big brushes ; they were sitting upon the grass with their parents, clerics and lay people together, telling each other of their troubles !

A BIOGRAPHICAL FRAGMENT

I was born on 1 March 1837, in the village of Humulești, in the upper part of the county of Neamț, of Romanian parents, Ștefan, son of Petrea Ciubotariul from Humulești, and his wife Smaranda, daughter of David Creangă, from the village of Pipirig, also in the county of Neamț.

First of all, I began to learn the alphabet following the old religious method, at the school in Humulești, which was a tiny room, built at the villagers' own expense, with help and prompting from Father Ion Humulescu, who possessed a handful of knowledge, a cartload of wits, and a great deal of kindheartedness. God rest his soul! I must have been about eleven years old when I started going to school. I know that I was then a scraggy, stunted little boy, afraid of my own shadow.

Our teacher was a handsome young bachelor, robust and healthy, named Vasile, son of Vasilca. He was also a singer in the village church. My father paid him one German sanct-covăț a month for teaching me. And in those days they called me in the village and in school, Ionică, son of Ștefan, son of Petrea.

After about a year Mester Vasile, our teacher, was seized and forced to join the army by a pressgang, with the connivance of the mayor. The school stood abandoned and we pupils, who were over forty in number, dispersed to our own homes. After another year the school opened again. However, Iordache, our new teacher, being a bit of a drunkard, began pulling our ears and brought down all too heavily on our backs St. Nicholas, a tawse made of leather straps, presented to the school by old Fotea, the village maker of sheepskin coats. Consequently, whereas until then I used to go willingly to school, I began to play truant, going to school one day and staying away two. Nevertheless, I had got in the habit of reading a bit.

Father had no booklearning at all, nor did he think very much of it. He would say to me fairly often, "Little scribbler, no cheese for you, a cup full of sour milk, you're chewing

things over too much before getting down to work; and I'm very much afraid that with so much booklearning, there'll be no one to pull our boots off for us." But my mother took notice of the way I was learning. She had reached the stage of reading the prayer book better than myself, and she rejoiced greatly when she saw how I took to booklearning. If it had been left to father, I might have done the best thing and stayed on, being just Nică, son of Ștefan, son of Petrea, a decent fellow and a good husband in the village of Humulești. Mother, however, was quite ready to spin wool to make sure that I might go on learning. But what more could I learn in Humulești? In church I read and sang by heart all the religious verses and songs as well as Iordache, the church singer.

One day soon after Christmas and before Carnival time, my grandfather David Creangă of Pipirig came to visit us, and he took me up into the mountains to the school of Alecu Bălus in the village of Broșteni, in the region of Suceava, and placed me in lodgings there at his expense with a woman, Irinuca, who had two shabby nanny-goats. From her place we attended the school; whether I caught booklearning or not, I certainly caught the itch from those goats, all right.

Close to Palm Sunday, our teacher Nanu allowed me to go home, and from Broșteni I was taken by some raftsmen down the Bistrița to Borca; from Borca I went with a relative of mine across the Old Highlands to Pipirig and from Pipirig to Humulești. When father and mother saw me cropped to the scalp and full of the itch, their joy knew no bounds. What were they to do? They began to bathe me first with a lye of boiled maize-stalks, then with wool-oil, or they would anoint me with birch-oil, and in less than a week they succeeded in ridding me of my decorative covering. I, for my part, sang on Easter Sunday a magnificent 'Angel cried aloud' in church, so that all the old women of the village gaped at me open-mouthed, while the girls nudged each other in the ribs, seeing what Nică, son of Ștefan, son of Petrea, could now do! Churchsinger Iordache was now left far behind, he was a fifth wheel to the cart. Poor mother, thinking that I was going to be a second Cucuzel, started urging father to send me to learn holy lore at the Church of the Assumption in Târgu Neamț, which was beyond the water, a two-stone

throws from our village. Father was now paying three husas[1] a month for me. At this school I studied for one winter, because it was only in winter time that I had time for schooling. In summer I didn't wear out the seat of my trousers on a school bench because I had to lend a hand at home : spinning, combing, warping, spooling bobbins and keeping the wheel spinning. I spun some three or four lots of coarse wool every day, rivaling the grown-up girls at it, and they, in the wickedness of their hearts, nicknamed me Ion Tor[2]

[1] Unit of Hungarian money in the 19th century.
[2] Ion the Spinner.

FATHER DUHU [1]

Many a person has occasionally come across a priest poorly dressed, small in stature, dark complexioned, balding, walking slowly and meditatively, giving a hearty "your servant, sir" to anyone who has remembered to notice him, yawning noisily when he could find no one to chat with, making lengthy halts in the secluded walks in the Iași public gardens, carrying a book in his hand, thrilled by the song of the birds and stopping, lost in wonder, by the ant-hills, which he called "wise republics", caressing the grass and the flowers of the field, those images of the life of man, which he used to water with a scalding tear from his eyes, and then, seized with hunger and tired with fatigue and meditation, making his way slowly back to his lodgings, where poverty with its table laid awaited him!

This was Father Isaiah Duhu, born in the village of Cogeasca Veche, in the administrative district of Iași.

Four walls belonging to another, smoky and covered with matting, piles of volumes in Greek, Latin, Bulgarian, French, Russian and Romanian, full of spiders and flung down anyhow in corners, an earthenware basin and pitcher for washing in the middle of the room, little puddles on the floor, litter and beetles swarming everywhere, a stale loaf of bread on the table and a tomcat curled up on the stove made up his Holiness's total wealth.

Great-hearted, even louder-voiced, Father Duhu was not destined for a better life, but it is clear that he didn't desire one, since he didn't hold his tongue in the presence of his superiors, nor even think of doing such a thing.

As a boy in the seminary at Socola, where he had been educated by his own efforts rather than by those of his teachers, he used to put his fingers on a stone and hit them with another stone out of annoyance at their not writing better; he used to beat himself over the head when he saw that not even the teacher could give a good explanation of

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[1] *Duh*: spirit, ghost; wit. Creangă plays on the meaning of *Duhu* on many occasions in this sketch. At these points the Romanian version is provided in the footnotes.

something or other, and any boy who interfered with his studies had good reason to look out for himself.

Though this nature of his was well known, one of the priests at Socola pronounced him fit to become a monk, nicknaming him the "Spirit of the devil" [1], and without more ado made him take his vows and the name Duhu stuck to him, though he signed himself Isaiah Teodorescu. From being a student, he became a teacher at Socola, and for some length of time imparted the spirit of his spirit to his pupils [2]. But he never stayed long in one place, Heaven forbid, for he was an unquiet spirit [3] and not at peace even with himself. Eager neither for wealth nor for advancement, contented with what he had or had not, suddenly, for no apparent reason: grab your bag and your staff, priest, and take to the road. As the saying goes: Out with you, be on your way, the villages aren't far away.

At one time he was a teacher in Socola, then in Iaşi, later at the monastery in Tîrgu Neamţ from which place he roamed the mountains with sweat on his brow and singing out at each step:

> The castle in ruins that crowns the bare height
> Whence numberless objects crowd into one's sight!

or:

> In an ancient castle, on a black rock set,
> Where down in the valley flows a rivulet.

or again:

> Little bird with yellow bill,
> Alas, you sang to me of ill!

What with one thing and another he tired of life here too, and back he went to Iaşi, falling in love with it for some time.

An irrepressible and bold spirit [4] in his sermons from the pulpits of churches he used to sting like a wasp, saying:

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[1] In Romanian, "Duh diavolesc."
[2] In Romanian, "şi duh din duhul său a dat şcolarilor săi o bucată de vreme."
[3] In Romanian, "căci era duh neastîmpărat şi neîmpăcat."
[4] In Romanian, "Duh neastîmpărat şi cutezător".

"Elijah cured Naaman the Syrian of leprosy by sending him to bathe in the waters of the Jordan. But I send you to the Căcaina [1], to be cleansed of the leprosy of ignorance and sloth!"

"Once upon a time there was a flower called 'maiden's blush,' very widespread in our country; but when fashionable messmakers [2] usurped the place of Romanian housewives, this flower began to disappear from our gardens and countryside."

He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

He pointed the finger of blame at the lackeys, the proud, and those living in luxury, saying:

"Ye hypocrites, Christ said: 'Cleanse ye first the inside of the glass and the dish, that the outside may be clean also.'"

And so on and so forth, and all published in the journal *The Preacher of Christian Morality*, edited by himself, until the Hierarchy took away his license to preach. But Father Duhu's tongue was not stopped from wagging.

Once, when a bishop was performing the service at the patronal festival of the church, on the Feast of the Annunciation, at Iași, Father Duhu went into the church, made long slow bows before the icons, and when a lot of people had assembled and the bishop was sitting on the episcopal throne, splendidly arrayed and with his miter on his head, Father Duhu stopped in front of him and said at the top of his voice, shaking his head the while:

"Mother's darling Cânilic, being a Metropolitan [3] suits you. Why isn't your mommy here to see you?"

Then, with a deep sigh, he added:

"When ye see the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not to be, know ye that the end is nigh, said Our Lord."

Then he withdrew disdainfully from the bishop's presence and going out of the church went on his way.

Meanwhile the other priests, dumbfounded and with their hands crossed on their breasts, were stunned almost to the

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[1] A tiny little tributary of the Bahlui which it joins at Iași.

[2] Our deformation of "dressmaker" into "messmaker" is an attempt to render Creangă's deformation of *marșandă* (dressmaker) into *mârșavă* (vile woman).

[3] *Metropolitan*: head of the Orthodox Church in Moldavia.

point of falling over, so frightened and ashamed were they for the bishop.

Not long after this the Metropolitan made Father Duhu a mitered bishop, thus giving him permission to wear robes costing thousands of lei, without his having the wherewithal to purchase them.

Father Isaiah, instead of going all out for alms and gifts like other priests, taking money from the living and the dead, so that he might get his finery, used to say that he, on the contrary, was of the opinion that rather than give alms to the poor on Saturdays, they would do better to give a drink to people with a hangover on Tuesdays.

Once, being asked by the churchwarden if he would perform the service in a church in a poor parish on the patron saint's day, Father Duhu hung a large wooden cross on his breast by a piece of coarse hempen string, saying :

"Forgive me, Lord, for having hung Thee by a thread, but I have no chain of gold or silver, such as those used to hang Thee by my superiors in the hierarchy."

At the great monastery of Neamț he was once chatting with Abbot Naftanail and he said mockingly to him that the Russians had spread in that Romanian monastery like the cholera they had brought in the wake of their horses in 1828. The abbot, unable to hold his own in this kind of talk, said to him after a little while : "Come, a truce to all this, Father Isaiah !" and began toasting him in mutual glasses of honey-sweetened brandy, glass after glass, until Father Duhu called out :

"Leave me alone, holy Father ; with so much Russian holy water the earth is whirling round me ; we'll do better without being reconciled."

Thereupon he began to sing the following verse to the second church chant :

"The children of Israel came forth from the encircling wave, with a jug and a roast turkey tied to their necks, and they praised the Lord."

Then he launched out on the Drunkards' Hymn sung to the fourth chant :

"In my youth many pots and mugs fought a losing battle against me, and as many glasses as there are stars in the sky...

Beaker mine, thou glass I love,
Thy voice is sweet as song of dove,
To my lips I raise thee up,
Hear thee murmuring : "Glup ! Glup !"
From leaving thee I'll always shrink,
Since on my face thou spill'st my drink...
Woe is me, poor kilderkin,
I would draw thee closer in.
When some friends make cheer with me,
Salvation true well' wish to thee.
When two or three more with me bide,
We shall lay thee on thy side,
Bring in a Russian priest forby,
Stand thee on end and drain thee dry !"

To a Greek bishop, who was blessing a deacon during the service, saying : "May God guide thy footsteps to all that is good," Father Duhu said :

"Nay, God would do better to guide your footsteps towards the Danube, holy Fathers, for you have defiled the church and the people with your humble blessings long enough."

To Professor Columb of the high school, who once greeted Father Duhu thus : "Good morning, Duhu," he replied :

"Thank you, corpse ! I believe you have sufficient learning to know that the words *priest* and *professor* both begin with the letter *p*, and so does the noun *pig*."

To the normally ordained priests, whom he called scornfully "Chaldeans," [1] he sang the following hymn :

So wide awake are the deacons and priests
They see less with their eyes than if they were beasts ;
So racked are the heads of their bibulous wives,
That they're muzzy and fuddled throughout their long lives !

So many insinuations and insults were exchanged between them, that he was sometimes too disgusted to want to meet them and to engage in further provocative talk.

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[1] This nickname was not invented by Duhu ; it was commonly used by priests of monastic orders when referring to members of the clergy who lived a less restricted life.

Once, when he was coming out in a rage from the Metropolitan's residence, he was met by Father Arbore of Baranovschi, who asked him :

"Where have you come from, Father Isaiah ?"

"I don't know !"

"Where are you going to, Father Isaiah ?"

"I don't know !"

"How can you not know where you've come from or where you're going to ?"

"This is how," replied Father Duhu. "When I was a boy, I used to spit in the palm of my left hand, then I banged the edge of my other palm down on the spittle, and in whichever direction it jumped, I went too."

"And you still carry on like that ?"

"Just like that, and the devil himself couldn't stop me."

"But what if the spittle had jumped in the direction of Golia,[1] what would you have thought of that ?"

"You've got me there, you Chaldean," said Father Duhu, hurrying away, boiling over with rage like a river in spate.

Once, after saving up, bit by bit, Father Duhu ordered some books on spiritualism and having read them he remarked to an acquaintance :

"If these books were to fall into the hands of some ignorant charlatans, you would hear them saying that they perform wonders just like the saints."

Blessed be the word of Father Duhu, for that's exactly what has happened. One day, being without money to buy himself bread, he bundled the books together and sold them to the headmaster of a primary school for a mere pittance. That was the beginning of spiritualism in Iasi. From then on Gregory Nazianz, Ephraim of Syria, Solomon the Wise and other dead people of past centuries could no longer rest in their graves, for the never-ending string of questions that were asked of them. Let them dare not answer and they're consigned to the devil for seven years.

When Father Duhu heard that rumors were going around Iasi about happenings of this kind, his Holiness began to reflect, saying :

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[1] A church in Iaşi, to which a lunatic asylum was attached.

"Woe to him who does evil, but woe, even more, to him through whom evil comes !"

Having fallen ill, perhaps on account of this very thing, he gave up his ghost [1], just when he had been appointed curator of the Nicorița church at Tatarași, and here, being close to the Eternity Cemetery, he took his last lodgings — may the earth lie lightly on him. From that time forth he was no more seen pacing the streets of Iași.

[1] In Romanian, "și-a dat duhul".

GOODMAN ION ROATĂ AND THE UNION OF THE PRINCIPALITIES

In 1857, when excitement about the Union was at boiling point in Iași, the liberal boyars of Moldavia, such as Costache Hurmuzaki, Mihai Kogălniceanu and others, deemed it right to summon to the Convention some leading men of the villages, one from each administrative region, so that they too should have a share in the carrying out of this splendid and noble national act.

As soon as the peasants got to Iași, the boyars each contributed their share and had them beautifully turned out and dressed alike, in white peasant coats and brand new fur caps. The peasants could scarcely make out what good fortune had come their way. Then, so the report goes, they handed them over to the care of one of the boyars who was to talk to them and make them understand the purpose for which they had been summoned to Iași.

"Good people, you well know why you've been summoned here among us," said the boyar gently.

"We'll know it, master, if you tell us," answered an older peasant shyly, scratching at his head.

"Well, it's like this, good people: for hundreds of years two twin countries, two Christian and neighboring countries, our Moldavia and Wallachia or Muntenia, the Mountainous Country, that you have no doubt heard about, have been squabbling with one another to the evil and utter destruction of the Romanian stock. Twin countries and Christian countries I said, good people, for as we Moldavians worship, so do our brothers from Wallachia worship. Our build, way of speaking, our food and clothing and all the customs we've got, our brothers, the Wallachians, have them too. Neighboring countries I said, good people, for it is only the little river Milcov which flows not far from Focșani that divides them. Let us, then, drink it dry at one draught and achieve the sacred Union, that is the brotherhood so much desired by our ancestors, but which they, in the difficult circumstances of their time, could not achieve. That is, good people, the fine and Christianlike deed we've got to accomplish. God speed us! Good people, is it clear to you why we've sum-

moned you? Now, if you have anything to say, have no fear, but speak out, in plain Moldavian speech, in the presence of the brothers that we are to you. For that is why we've come together, to help each other see things through and may God help us all, as He best knows."

"You've made it quite clear, master, and you're bound to be right," some of the more bashful peasants replied; "for unless you gentry know the ways of the world, how shall we tell right from wrong, we peasants who walk behind the plough?"

"To tell you the truth, master, I, for one, am not clear about it," said one of the peasants, by name Ion Roată, boldly. "For even though we might have some idea of one thing or another, whoever would listen to us? You know the saying, master: A peasant stamps the ground as he walks and croaks when he talks, begging your honor's pardon. I rather think this job might have been done without our help; for though we may perhaps know how to wield the hoe, the scythe, and the sickle, it is you who wield the pen, and on occasion you know how to make white look black and black look white. God has granted you wits that you might give advice to us, the common people."

"Nay, good people, the time is past when the boyars alone managed everything in this land and milked it to their liking. Nowadays all of us, from bishop to peasant, must have a hand in running the country and the happiness of the land. Work and profit, duties and rights, equally for us all."

The boyar then told them about the origin of the Romanian people, how and by whom they had been brought into these regions; about their hardships and the way they had finally been torn asunder and scattered through other lands. Examples he gave them in plenty: the handful of twigs, the enraged bulls, and the rest, and thus did he, poor Christian, do his utmost to make them understand the wholesome fruits of the Union; reminding them, moreover, that it was "for the coming together of all people" that the holy church itself had been daily praying for the past 1,050 years and more.

"Well, good people, I venture to say you've got it clear now!"

"Clear, master, as clear as daylight," most of them answered. "God speed you in these your good courses!"

"Nay, master, I still haven't got it clear," goodman Roată answered.

"God help us, goodman Ion, but as far as I can see, you are a trifle thick-headed; let us go into the garden and I'll make you see it better. Goodman Ion, do you see that huge boulder, over there, in my courtyard?"

"That I do, master."

"Be so good as to bring it here, by my side," said the boyar who was now sitting in an armchair amidst the peasants.

"Begging your pardon, master, I won't be able to do that, for it's a weight, it is, and no mistake."

"Just try and see."

Goodman Roată went over to the boulder and tried to lift it, but failed.

"Goodman Vasile, do you go too and you, goodman Ilie, and you, too, goodman Pandelachi."

The upshot of the matter was that three or four peasants set to work, shifted the boulder, lifted it onto their shoulders and brought it to the boyar's side.

"Well now, good people, do you see it? Goodman Roată went and could not do the job alone; but when some of you lent a helping hand, the job was easily done; the weight was no longer the same. You know the old song:

> He has no might who stands alone,
> His life is naught but pain and toil,
> Where many are, their force has grown,
> No foe dare face them on their soil.

It's the same with the Union, good people. And don't think that if God be willing and Moldavia and Wallachia should come together that would be the end of the affair! Our brothers in Transylvania, Bukovina, Bessarabia and those beyond the Danube, in Macedonia and other parts of the world, just let them see that we're living together in harmony, they'll rejoice and cherish us so that no enemies shall dare touch the Romanians for ever and ever. And then our blood-brothers: the French, the Italians, the Spaniards, and the Portuguese, what do you think they are waiting for? Upon the merest move, God help us, they stand ready to shed their blood for us. Union is strength, good people. Well, now I think you've grasped things, absolutely and thoroughly."

"Nay, I for one, begging your pardon, master, have not yet grasped it," said goodman Roată.

"How is that, goodman Ion? I have put it so clearly that a mere child might have understood it."

"So you have, master," said the others.

"Goodman Roată," the boyar now said somewhat ruffled and not a little tired. "Come, tell us in your own way what you've understood or not understood after all the discussion we've had; let us hear it too."

"Well now, master, don't take it amiss; yet talking about things and doing things are two different matters. Yourself, like any boyar, have just ordered us to bring that boulder over here: yet you didn't join us in carrying it, in the way you were just saying, namely that from now on one and all would take part in the hardships, from the highest to the lowest. Were it so, a good thing it would be, master, for backward in the fight and forward at the feast is none too good a reckoning.

And that boulder of yours, I take it this way: so far, we peasants have carried some weight, bigger or lesser, on our shoulders; yet now are we called upon to bear in concord a rock upon our backs, and that's us again, the peasantry. Would to God, master, it were different, I for one should not be sorry..."

On hearing this the other peasants began to shrug their shoulders, looking meaningfully into each other's eyes and saying:

"Well, there might be something in what old Roată says, might not there be?"

While the boyar, leading them on and cracking jokes, had to swallow it and keep his mouth shut.

Iași, May 4th 1880.

GOODMAN ION ROATĂ AND PRINCE CUZA

Among the foremost peasants who, together with the boyars, the bishops and the metropolitan of Moldavia, took part in the *ad-hoc* Convention held in Moldavia in the year 1857, was goodman Roată, an honest and decent man, as most Romanian peasants are in all parts of the country. On one point, however, goodman Roată was a little exceptional: after all he'd seen and been through in his lifetime, he did not put much trust in the boyar's talk and he had a froward tongue, that is to say he would speak out plainly to any man's face, whoever he might be, if he had something on his mind that was rankling him. That's the way of a peasant, he's a bit of a tough customer. And old Roată being, as I have said, a peasant, although he had the distinction of associating with the boyars, had no secret recesses in his soul.

In the *ad-hoc* Convention of Moldavia were boyars of all sorts and conditions: greater and lesser ones, older and younger ones, educated and uneducated ones, as that moment of time had found them. Among the second sort were men like the old boyar Alecu Forăscu, nicknamed the Windbag, Grigore Cuza and others who, keeping up the old customs, would reverently sit through the whole services on red-letter days, singing and reading in unison with the church singers and the clergy, and on feast days would not enjoy the merry-making unless they broke bread with the orphans, the widows, and the needy like their ancestors before them. That was as far as their head took them, and that much they did in their lifetimes; may their souls rest in peace wherever they may be, for their hearts were kind!

However, let us get back to the *ad-hoc* Convention. Here, as in all such gatherings, there was any amount of talking; it was indeed in the way of things that there should be, the present times and the past being at loggerheads over the just cause of the Romanian people: the Union, the sacred Union!

The younger boyars, brought up abroad from their childhood in the French and German ways, were critical of the past, and, at the same time, very vocal. They could no longer

approve of the old-fashioned speech, dress, and ways of life, and therefore some of them in their enthusiasm would dub their elders old fogeys, *işlic*[1]-wearers, phantoms from the past, and anything else of the kind they could think of, each according to the way he had been brought up, for these were educated people, weren't they now?

No doubt the old ones could be mighty stupid too. Now and then, when roused, they would give as good as they got, calling the younger generation *bonjourists*, hotheaded coxcombs, dandified maccaronis, weak in the head and conceited upstarts who had forsworn their faith and were ruining speech and customs. Such was the head-on clash between the older boyars and the younger, within the *ad-hoc* Convention of Moldavia, although both sides were in favour of the Union. The only difference being that the older ones wanted it after due deliberation, while the younger wanted it to be a spontaneous union without deliberation, which was, in fact, the way it was eventually concluded.

Be that as it may, a hard time some of the younger boyars had with His Lordship Alecu Forăscu, who would bicker and bite all day long, complaining now that they didn't speak plain Romanian as their parents did before them, but had defiled the ancestral tongue so that no one could follow them, now that "you're wangling this so as to pull the wool over our eyes," now that, no matter how small a bargain one strikes, there should still be some terms agreed between the parties, who should not plunge in with their eyes closed, for "no document means no security, and that's flat." Then he said: "What with this living abroad you've grown away from your country in law, language, and heart, and you've lost even the love of your peasants, and judging by the carelessness and squandering on worthless things that's going on, throwing money to the winds, there's little left to be disposed of and the day of reckoning is not far off, as I see it. You just ask these poor forsaken peasants and see if they know who their master is. They're like no man's dogs, poor devils! The one who gets in first is master in their village, driving and working them worse than cattle! Leave things to the upstarts and the strangers and they'll see to it that we go to the dogs, sure enough!" Then again:

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[1] Old-fashioned fur cap worn by the boyars, the shape and size of which varied according to their rank.

woe to the country that has fallen into the hands of children for its management, and, much talk, little wool, and, if that was their intention, they could get on with it, as for him, he'd sooner go home, for his horses would be soaked in the rain and his cattle would be bellowing for food because of the servants who have no care for their master's belongings. There was no end to this stream of quaint notions. Leave it to the old to bewitch and to shrive you in their own fashion and you'll need no priest. That's just the sort of persons boyar Alecu Forăscu and his like were.

Now let's leave that subject.

One day, as one of the young boyars was making a fine speech, goodman Ion Roată intervened :

"Would you be so good as to speak a bit more Moldavian-like, master, so that we too might take it in ? To tell you the truth, I for one can make neither head nor tail of it, God help me !"

A certain boyar then turned sharply on goodman Ion Roată, saying in a spiteful and domineering tone of voice :

"And what great need is there for you to take it in, you lout ? As you are here, just hold your tongue, for we'll soon be back home and then, don't you worry, you'll have a taste of what I'm thinking of. Such impudence ! Here you are, brother, with two hundred and thirty thousand acres of estate to your name, and he, a boor with a mere patch of land, and just listen to him prattling away !"

Goodman Ion Roată, feeling stung to the quick, answered plaintively :

"Now, master, if you didn't want us to understand anything of what you're saying, then why did you have us here, to make a laughing-stock of us ? I say, master ! Important and powerful you are and my neighbor too, since I'm a freeholder, and I well know that it won't be a bed of roses for me when I get back home, where hardships are in store for me. Yet, begging your pardon, this I will say : it's these gruff peasant hands of ours, scratched by thistles, that have kept you going in comfort and luxury from time immemorial. And what's more, you welcome every newcomer to this land and look on while he sucks us dry : you say nothing against it and you accept him as one of yourselves ! Yet we, drudging cattle, you cannot bear the sight of us. Louts and boors and blockheads we always were and always will be ! Heaven forgive us and you too, master, but it's God's own truth

you've a way of picking your chestnuts out of the fire with our boorish hands, and still we're the ones on whom the load rests !"

"Blessed be your mouth, goodman Ion ; you've spoken out of painful experience," exclaimed boyar Alecu Forăscu. "Glad I am to have you sit by me. I'd sooner have a peasant with a cartload of wits than a *bonjourist* with a handful of learning !"

At these words many of the boyars felt offended ; the one particularly concerned stood there dumbfounded. Colonel Alexandru Cuza shook hands heartily with goodman Ion Roată.

At long last, after many stormy debates carried on in the *ad-hoc* Convention, the Union was agreed upon ; and so the delegates each returned to their own homes.

A few years after this, on his way to Bucharest, Prince Cuza stopped at Agiud where a large gathering of people saluted him as befits a reigning prince.

Among the people who were pressing around with or without a purpose suddenly a paper was seen fluttering at the end of a pole over the heads of the crowd. Realizing that here was some soul tried beyond endurance, Prince Cuza motioned that they should make way for him. And behold ! An old peasant fell on his knees before the Prince, kissing his hand with tears in this eyes and handing him a paper written on both sides.

"Well, if it isn't goodman Ioan Roată, my old friend and comrade of the *ad-hoc* Convention ! Get up, goodman Ion, and tell me plainly what it is that troubles you ? Has anyone been bothering you ?"

Seeing that after all these years Colonel Alexandru Cuza had not forgotten him and had welcomed him so kindly, goodman Ion Roată began to sob aloud and ask him to read his paper.

Being on the point of departure and seeing that the paper of goodman Roată contained a vast deluge of words, the prince gently said :

"Say what you've got to say, by word of mouth, goodman Ion, and I shall take it in better !"

So goodman Roată, coming to, started complaining as follows :

"Your Highness !

Ever since that very plague of an *ad-hoc* there's been no living with my powerful neighbor, the owner of a very large estate, known to Your Highness. I never thought, poor me, that so powerful a landlord, rolling in wealth and learned too, would stoop to plot and scheme against such as me on account of some ill-placed words that I then spoke in anger. May God keep him in health and wealth, but he's done a power of harm to my possessions and my good name ! If you'll believe me, Your Highness, I was not the poorest and least respected among my own kind. But as soon as I got home, prosecution and persecution were loosed against me by the boyar, in every possible way.

The first thing he did was to set his servants to pick a quarrel with me and reduce me to beggary. And they used every devilish device that unreasonable and vicious men can, either themselves or acting through others, to drive my animals one little step on to the boyar's land, and then, on the pretext of their having done damage, to be justified in ruthlessly killing them ! And so one day it was the pigs, the next, the cows and oxen, the day after it was the horses, another day it was driving flocks of sheep to the manor ; you may well imagine, Your Highness, that it was like being ravaged by a mighty plague !

So after a while, seeing that there was no end to these losses, I took my courage in both hands and went to the boyar's to complain. And the boyar, instead of saying a kind word to me, spat in my face in full view of his servants and the other people who were then at the manor. I thought the very heavens had fallen on me for shame ! But that wasn't all ; he threatened me that should I set foot again on his estate, he would have me stretched out in front of the steps and whipped ! And in this way, Your Highness, in a few years they have completely ruined me and deprived me of my good name too, which had been my dearest possession !"

Prince Cuza stood still, looking hard at goodman Ioan Roată while he talked. And when he had finished, the Prince put two purses of gold napoleons into his hand, saying kindly :

"There, goodman Ion, take this small gift from me and look after yourself from one day to the next as the Lord

shall best show you how. And leave the boyar to the judgment of God whose ways are not our ways."

Tears welled up anew in the old man's eyes and kissing the prince's hand by way of thanks, he said with a sigh:

"And what about the shame he's put on me, Your Highness?"

"As to the shame, here's how we'll deal with that, goodman Ion," said the Prince kissing him on both cheeks in sight of the assembled crowd. "Go and tell the people of your village that where the boyar spat on you, there the Prince of the country has kissed you and wiped away the shame."

Iași, November 13th, 1882.

GOODMAN NICHIFOR SLYBOOTS

Goodman Nichifor is no character out of a fairytale, but a man of flesh and blood like any normal human being. He lived, once upon a time, while he was on this earth, in the outlying part of Tîrgu Neamț, called Țuțuieni, on the Vinători Neamțului side. Goodman Nichifor lived in Țuțuieni during the period when my great-great-grandfather played the bagpipes at the merrymaking accompanying the christening of goodman Dediu from Vinători's child, and Ciubăr Vodă got forty-nine two-year-old ewes each with a black ring around one eye from Dediu for being his godfather. The priest was my mother's great-great-uncle Ciubuc the Bellman, from the Neamț monastery, the same who had had a great big bell put in the said monastery at his own expense, and such was his passion for ringing it himself on great church festivals that they called him the Bellman. At that very same time did goodman Nichifor dwell at Țuțuieni.

Goodman Nichifor was a coachman. His wagon, though patched up with ropes and leather straps, was still a good one, roomy and serviceable, with a tilt of rush matting to keep out the sun and the rain. Midway between the front and the rear wheels hung the grease-box, with brush and wedge, which banged about, going bing-bong, bing-bong, when the wagon was moving. From a hook in the left-hand underbeam hung a hatchet in readinesss for anything that might befall him. Two mares, as white as snow and as hot-spirited as fire, would usually be harnessed one on each side of the single central shaft of the wagon — usually, but not always, for goodman Nichifor dealt in horses too, and when he saw the chance of a quick profit he would exchange or sell a mare on the spot, even in the course of a journey, and so there would be no animal at all on one side of the shaft. The old man liked to have young and shapely mares; it was a weakness of his. Why mares and why always white ones? you might ask. I'll tell you why: mares, because goodman Nichifor wanted them for brood mares; white ones, because the white color of the mares, he said, would serve as a lantern at nights on the road.

Goodman Nichifor was not the sort of man to be ignorant of the saying: "It's a bad look-out when you drive white horses and are a servant to women;" on the contrary, he well knew that, but the mares were his own, and when he groomed them, groomed they were, and when he did not, there was no one to nag at him.

Goodman Nichifor hated carting like the devil. He avoided lifting things because he was frightened of rupturing himself.

Carrying, he used to say, is better, for you're always dealing with people, and when the road goes uphill, they get down and walk, when it goes downhill, they get down and walk, and when the coach is at rest, they sit inside. Goodman Nichifor had one of those hemp whips, plaited by his own hand, with a silken whip-lash to it, and this he'd crack with a noise fit to deafen you. Whether his wagon was loaded or empty, when he came to a hill, goodman Nichifor would get out and put a shoulder to the wheel to make things easy for the mares. When he came to a descent, out he got again, so as not to overwork the mares. And his passengers, willy-nilly, had to get out too, for they soon had their fill of Nichifor's grumbling. He'd keep up a string of remarks like: "Come on, now, step down a bit, all of you; a horse is not an animal that can say what he thinks, you know."

If you knew how to put him in the mood, goodman Nichifor was as jocular as could be. When he met a man on horseback on the road, he would ask: "Have you left the Prince far behind, young fellow?" Then he would whip up the mares, saying:

> The white one in front, the white at the wheels,
> On to Galați the old coach reels,
> We're short of a horse at one shaft side,
> Be it one horse or eight, it's but a short ride!

When he came across matrons and maids in the course of his journeys, he would sing ribald songs like:

> When to my old girl I was tied,
> Eight of my doxies sobbed and sighed;
> Three were wives with husbands neat
> And five were girls from the same village street.

Now don't you just long to set out, I ask you, especially in the month of May, with such a worthy and ever merry fellow? Now and then, if, when passing the village inn, you feigned not to see it and would not wet his whistle, then he would not be in such good spirits, but would drive like blazes from one pub to the next.

One time in particular he had got hold of two fine mares that could perform wonders on the road. Yet it was impossible for them not to stop at every tavern, for he'd bought them from a priest, there being no fire stations in those days, from which he might have bought the sort of animal that could keep galloping and never stop.

Father said, and he had it from other old fellows, who had heard it from goodman Nichifor's own mouth, that in those days being a coachman in Tîrgu Neamț was a fine job; the customers fought among themselves to get you. As you came out of Văratic you got a fare to Agapia; no sooner did you leave Agapia than off you'd go to Văratic and back again; then you'd be hired for Războieni, then some smaller cloister. You had fares in plenty, more in fact than you'd be happy to take. You'd be driving them to Piatra, to Fălticeni, to fairs, to the Neamț monastery, to Secu or to Risca, and all over the country to religious festivals and feasts.

It was father again who told me, just as he had had it from my great-great grandfather, that the then archdeacon of Neamț had said to some nuns who were wandering about the town in Holy Week:

"Sisters!"

"Your blessing on us, holy Father!"

"Why don't you settle down in your convent and look after your souls, during Holy Week at least!"

"Well now, Holy Father," they are supposed to have replied humbly, "it is this wool that's our undoing, more's the pity! We had as soon stay away, yet, as your holiness knows, we depend mainly on our worsted cloth for our living, and, if it doesn't rain it may still drizzle, and if you're on the move you may get a bite."

The poor archdeacon then sighed heavily, they say, swallowed his gall and put all the blame on goodman Nichifor, saying:

"May the coachman who's driven you here drop down dead, and then there'd be no one to cart the lot of you to town quite so often."

When this came to the ears of goodman Nichifor, he was touched to the quick and took a binding oath to have no more dealings with the clergy as long as he lived, for goodman Nichifor was a godfearing man, worse luck, and much afraid of falling under the priestly curse! Off he ran then, to be cleansed of his sins, as fast as his legs could carry him, to the little monastery at Vovidenia, to Kiriac, the hermit of St. Agura, who used to dye his hair and beard with black cherry juice and cook an egg in a candle flame on Good Friday. Thereupon he resolved that from that time on he would deal mainly with tradespeople.

"The merchant alone," said goodman Nichifor, "lives off his own hump and does just as he likes." When you asked why, old Nichifor would reply jestingly: "Because the Lord God has no master."

He was fond of a joke, was goodman Nichifor, true enough, but after all he'd been through in his lifetime he had grown a bit crusty.

His old wife had something, I don't exactly know what, wrong with her, and had lately started creaking: now a pain here, now a pain there, then she's having an ear-ache treated, then she's asking for a love-spell, then it's a fit of weeping to be cured, and she'd go from one white witch to another and dabble in charms and poultices. Old Nichifor didn't like the looks of things at all and he was more often than not out of humor; he would even grow quarrelsome, and if he stayed round the house two or three days on end, he'd get so peevish and mean that his poor old wife would be mighty glad to see the back of him and let him get out of the house no matter what the reason of his going.

It may well be that goodman Nichifor was born under the stars, for no sooner was he on the road than he'd be another man. He'd never stop cracking his whip, joking with every wayfarer he met and telling yarns about all the places of any consequence they passed on the road.

One morning, it was the Wednesday before Whit Sunday, goodman Nichifor had taken his wagon apart and was oiling it. All of a sudden who should pop up behind him but Master Strul of Tîrgu Neamț, who traded in raddle, salves, Spanish white, rouge, hairdye, blue vitriol, alum crystals, chemicals for concocting face pomades, sarsaparilla, mercuric vapours and other such poisonous wares.

In these days there was no apothecary's shop in Tîrgu Neamț and Master Strul rendered a favor to the monks and the nuns by keeping everything they could possibly need. As a matter of fact there were some other little jobs he did for them... Well, I don't quite know how to put it, but he was something more than a Father confessor and the holy places could not have managed without him.

"Goot morning, goodman Nichifor!"

"Good morning to you, Master Strul. What brings you this way?"

"It's my daughter-in-law, she wants to go to Piatra. How much will it be to take her?"

"Now, she'll be having plenty of baggage and doubtless some oddities in the way of your goods," said old Nichifor, scratching himself behind the ear; "and there's no reason why she shouldn't, seeing as how my wagon is roomy and has space for a lot of things inside it. No need for us to wrangle about the fare, Master Strul; just give me sixteen lei, a gold twenty piastre piece, and I'll drive her for you smooth and without a hitch, for, as you see, the wagon is just back from having new rims fitted and I've given it the very devil of a good oiling and greasing, so it'll glide along as smooth as a reel."

"Make it nine lei, goodman Nichifor, and the little tip my son shall give you in Piatra in addition."

"Alright then, so let it be, and God prosper the matter, Master Strul! I'm glad it's at the height of the fair, so that I've a chance of picking up something on the way back as well. All I want to know now is, when do we start?"

"Right away, goodman Nichifor, if you're ready."

"Ready it is, Master Strul: I'll just water the mares. You go and get your daughter in-law ready, and I'll catch up with you in a jiffy."

Quick and full of zest at his work, as was his custom, old Nichifor threw some fodder into the cart, spread a couple of rugs on top of it, harnessed the good mares, flung his sheep-skin coat over his shoulders, grabbed his whip and was on his way. Master Strul had scarcely managed to reach home, when old Nichifor pulled up at the door.

Malca — this was the name of Master Strul's daughter-in-law — came out of the house and saw her coachman. She was a native of Piatra and as red as a peony because of her crying at leaving her parents in-law. It was the first time

she'd come to Neamț, to break the ice with her in-laws, as we say. It was just about a fortnight since she'd been married to Iţic, Master Strul's son, or rather I should say since Iţic had been married to Malca; for he had been the one to leave home, as was customary with them, and the following week Iţic had brought Malca to Neamț, entrusted her to his parents and hurried back to Piatra to get down to the business of earning the shekels.

"You've been as good as your word, goodman Nichifor!"

"I have, Master Strul; an honest man's word is as good as his bond. I don't let the grass grow under my feet, that I don't, for a man should set out on his way as early as possible and put up betimes at nightfall."

"Will you get to Piatra before nightfall, goodman Nichifor?"

"Good gracious me, what a question, Master Strul! With God's help I'm intending to put your daughter-in-law down in Piatra some time this afternoon."

"You're an old hand at this, goodman Nichifor, you know best. I do ask you, all the same, to drive carefully and not to overturn the cart and tip my daughter-in-law out!"

"Indeed I'm no greenhorn in this trade, Master Strul. I've been driving plenty of ladies and nuns of good families and other people of quality and, the Lord be praised, no one's had to complain about me. There's just Mother Evlampia, the bursar of the convent, from Văratic, that I've once had a bit of a tiff with, and no one else. Wherever she went she would tie her cow to the cart so as to be able to have a bit of milk on the way and save a copper or two. This would cause me a lot of trouble, for you know how cows are: it would scatter the hay-leavings at the back of the cart or sometimes break the base rail, and what's more, uphill it would tug at the rope until once it pretty near throttled the good mares. As a man will when he's annoyed, I would venture to say: 'Good Mother, what's the reason for this penny-wise, pound foolish nonsense?' Then she would give me a winning look and say in a coaxing voice: 'Now hold your tongue, goodman Nichifor, and don't you rail against my poor innocent cow, for it's no fault of hers, poor little dear. The holy hermits of St. Agura prescribed by way of penance that I should drink the milk of but one cow, so as not to grow old too soon. So what am I to do? We've got to comply, for they, in their saintliness, know more than we poor sinners do!' On hearing

this I thought to myself that the Reverend Mother Bursar might well be right, and so I left her to her own devices, for I saw that she was a difficult customer and that she must needs 'gang her ain gait.' But you, Master Strul, I trust you'll not encumber me with cows on this journey. And then, young Mistress Malca will get down and walk a little where the going's a bit steep uphill or downhill; especially as it's a fine sight out in the countryside at this time of the year when the very animals are kicking up their heels for joy. However, let's not waste time in idle talk. Come, up with you, Mistress Malca, that I may take you home to that dear husband of yours, for I well know the way of young wives: when the husbands are not around, they'll pine and hanker after home like horses after a bag of barley."

"I'm ready, goodman Nichifor."

Now was the moment for them all to load on to the wagon mattresses, soft pillows, a bundle of food and other odds and ends. Then Malca took leave of her parents-in-law and climbed on top of the mattresses, at the back of the wagon, while goodman Nichifor leaped on the box, whipped up the mares, and left Master Strul and his household with tears streaming down their cheeks.

Goodman Nichifor drove so fast through the town, you'd have thought the mares, in sober truth, had wings to their feet.

Over the river, through the village of Humulești and over the hill he passed like a flash. All the way from Ozeni to Grumăzești he drove at full speed.

But after Grumăzești he took a swig of brandy from his Brașov flask, lit his pipe, and began to ease the reins.

"Lord, good mistress! Do you see this fine, big village? It's Grumăzești. If I had as many young bulls in the stable and yourself as many sons as there be Tartars and other heathen fallen dead here at various times, things would indeed be going well for us!"

"May God hear you and grant me sons, goodman Nichifor!"

"May he do the same with young bulls for me, good mistress, for of sons there is no hope, seeing that my old woman is barren and not up to giving me one; I hope God won't let too many die before her! Were I to breathe my last, there would be no one to inherit this wagon and the mares would be left abandoned!"

"Don't be bitter, goodman Nichifor," said Malca; "maybe that was God's will, and it says in our books that some men have had children in their old age."

"Don't come at me, mistress, with those books of yours, for I well know what's what. You can turn water in a churn as long as you like, you'll get no butter! I've heard say in our church that 'the tree that bears no fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire.' Now, what better and apter saying than that do you want? My word, I cannot help wondering how I've had the patience to live all these years with that baggage. In the matter of that your law's a thousand times better. If one woman bears you no child, you can take another. If she proves no better, take another. After a while you must hit on one with God's blessing upon her; not like us whose lot it is to go on living with a barren one to the end of our days without ever a sign of a child. God Almighty did not die on the cross for one man alone in this world. Now isn't that so, good mistress? Speak up, if you've anything to say."

"Maybe you're right, goodman Nichifor."

"Nay, I'm sure of it, good mistress. Heigh ho! We've come a good stretch of the road. Lord, how you while away the time with talking, and when you sit up and take notice, goodness knows where you've got to; one of the real blessings of the Lord is this companionship! Giddy up, daddy's fiery mares, giddy up! Now, here's Grumăzești Forest, a nuisance to merchants and a terror to rich boyars. Well, good mistress, were this forest able to speak and tell all it has witnessed, we should hear of mighty goings-on; there'd be plenty for us to hear."

"And what might have happened here, goodman Nichifor?"

"My good mistress! What's past is gone, never to return, please God! Could anyone go through these places without being robbed, flogged or killed? As a matter of fact, it happens mostly at night, not in daylight. Yet I for one, knock on wood, have so far been spared, thank God! Wolves and other beasts have sometimes crossed my path, but I've left them alone, and pretended not to have seen them, and they've gone their way."

"Alack goodman Nichifor, don't speak about wolves, for I'm frightened to death of them!"

I've said before that goodman Nichifor was a wag, and when he gave his mind to it, either you'd hold your sides with laughter, or he'd scare the life out of you.

"There's a wolf now, coming towards us, good mistress!"

"Alas, goodman Nichifor, where shall I hide?"

"Wherever you like, as far as I'm concerned. I've told you that I don't mind a whole pack of them."

So poor Malca clung round goodman Nichifor's neck and stuck to him like a leech, for fear. She stayed there for a while, then said in a tremble:

"Where's the wolf, goodman Nichifor?"

"Where should it be? It crossed the path in front of us and plunged into the woods. But you very nearly strangled me, good mistress, and had I let go of the reins, we should have been in a fine mess."

Hardly had old Nichifor done speaking than Malca whispered:

"Please don't say again that a wolf's coming, goodman Nichifor, you frighten the life out of me."

"It's not my saying it, it's his doing it! Sure enough, there he is!"

"Alack and alas! What's that you say?"

And she again nestled up to goodman Nichifor.

"Youth will be youth; you *are* having a game, aren't you, good mistress? From what I can see, it's lucky for you that I keep my head about me and am not scared of wolves; but if I were somebody else..."

"That wolf isn't coming again, is it, goodman Nichifor?"

"My word, you're a merry one, aren't you? You want them to come thick and fast, as if there were one for every tree. It's about St. Andrew's Day that they wander in packs. And what do you imagine the hunters are doing? In a big hunt do you think there'll be few wolves making fools of themselves and leaving their skins behind, eh? Now, let's rest the mares a bit. This here's the Dragon's Hill, good mistress. This is the very place where a mighty big dragon once fell to earth: it spat fire from its mouth, and when it hissed, the woods seethed and the dales groaned, and the wild beasts fell trembling and bashing their heads with fear, so that no living soul would come across here."

"Lord a'mercy, and where's the dragon, goodman Nichifor?"

"How should I know, good mistress? The wood's deep enough, and only he will know where he's hidden himself away. Some say that when he'd eaten up a great many people and gnawed away the bark of all the trees in the wood, he burst on this very spot. I've heard others say they gave him the milk of a black cow and that helped him rise up into the sky where he had come from. I can hardly tell who's right, for men often speak such nonsense. I'm lucky, I am, for I know some spells and I don't mind dragons much, either. I can catch a snake in its hole just as easily as you can catch a chicken in the hen-house."

"And what are those spells, goodman Nichifor?"

"That, good mistress, I cannot give away. Now take my old woman — we've lived in wedlock together for nearly twenty-four years — she's done everything in her power and nagged my head off to get me to tell her, and still I haven't. And when the time comes for her to die, and I hope too many won't die before her, then I'd marry some young slip of a girl, and if I could have just three days with her to spend as I know how, then I'd die gladly! I'm right fed up with the musty old hag, for she keeps nagging at me and worrying the life out of me and all on account of young women. To think that I'll be going back home to her! I feel like going raving mad or clearing out, and that's a fact!"

"Now, now, goodman Nichifor, that's the way with all of you men."

"There, good mistress, here we are near the edge of the wood. Just get down a bit, till we are at the top of the hill. I'm afraid you'll grow stiff in the wagon, that's all I have in mind. I say, just see how the lovely flowers on the outskirts of the wood fill the air with their smell, and you squatting up there. Now isn't that a pity?"

"I'm afraid of the wolf, goodman Nichifor," said Malca in a tremble.

"Damn the wolf! Haven't you anything else to talk about?"

"Then pull up a bit, so that I may jump down."

"Whoa there! Just leap lightly over the carriage-board. There's a brave girl! That's how I like a person to be: a man, forsooth, and not a chicken!"

While Malca was picking some herbs to take home to Itic, goodman Nichifor had pulled up and was messing about and pottering mysteriously around his wagon. Then he called briskly :

"Are you ready, good mistress ? Come, up here and, with God's blessing, let's get started ; it's mostly downhill now."

After she'd climbed up, Malca said :

"Isn't it getting late, goodman Nichifor ?"

"Well, the worst is over. I'll soon be setting you down in Piatra." Then he lashed the mares, singing :

The white one in front, the white at the wheels,
On to Galați the old coach reels,
We're short of a horse at one shaft side,
Be it one horse or eight, 'tis but a short ride !

He hadn't gone above twenty furlongs when snap ! An axletree broke.

"Well, here's a good one !"

"Alas, goodman Nichifor, we'll be left in the forest at night !"

"Don't you be a prophet of woe, good mistress ; it's not the first time this has happened to me. By the time you've had a bite and the mares a mouthful of hay, I'll have the axletree to rights."

But when old Nichifor took a glance at the hook, the hatchet was missing.

"Well, so far things haven't gone too badly," said old Nichifor, frowning and flying into a rage. "But this is a terrible business. Blast the old hag ! That's how she looks after me. It's plain there's no hatchet there, is there ?"

When Malca, poor thing, heard that, she began to whimper and said :

"Goodman Nichifor, whatever shall we do ?"

"Come, come, good mistress, don't lose heart, for I still have a bit of hope."

Thereupon he took his knife out of its sheath, sharpened it on the whetstone and began to hack and hew at a branch from a young oak-tree. Somehow or other he got through it and then he started rummaging inside the driver's box looking for a bit of rope ; but, if nobody put it there, how could he take it out ?

Seeing that there's nothing else for it, he cut the handle off the bag, then the bridle at the head of one of the mares,

and did his best to tie the pole where it was wanted ; he put the wheel back on, knocked in the side support, pushed home the linkingrod and made all secure. Then he lit his pipe and said :

"There, good mistress, that's how necessity was the mother of invention. With old Nichifor of Tutuieni there's no risk of anyone getting lost on the road. Hold on tight to the side and the back rails, for I'll drive these mares so fast that they'll knock sparks off the road. But I'd have you know one thing : that old woman of mine won't get off lightly when I get back home. I'll grab hold of her by the hair of her head and jolly well teach her how to look after her husband another time. A woman who's not soundly beaten is like a mill wheel with no buckets. Hold tight good mistress ! Giddy up, there."

Off went the mares at such a pace that the wheels creaked and the dust whirled sky-high. But only a few furlongs on, the pole was rubbed hot and went awry and bang, clatter, bang, the wheel flew off again.

"Well, I'll be damned ! Here's a pretty mess. It looks like a priest or something, the devil knows what, crossed my path this morning !"

"Goodman Nichifor, what shall we do now ?"

"We'll manage somehow, good mistress. For the time being you just calm yourself and don't say a word. It's a good thing it didn't happen somewhere in open country. There's wood enough to spare, thank goodness, in the forest. Somebody may catch up with us from behind or come towards us and lend me a hatchet."

At the very moment he said this, lo and behold ! he caught sight of a man coming their way and carrying a bag slung from a stick on his shoulder !

"Well, good man ! So the road has broken down in the middle of the cart, has it ?"

"Jesting apart, good fellow, come and help me put this axletree to rights, for I'm nigh bursting with rage."

"I'm in a hurry to get to Oslobani. It'll do you no harm to spend the night in the forest ; I shouldn't think you'll die from a lack of entertainment !"

"I'm surprised at you, I am," said Nichifor gloomily. "You're more of a wrinkled, dry old bag of bones than I am, to have such thoughts running through your head !"

"Now, don't take it amiss, good man, for I was only joking. Goodbye and God teach you what to do!" And with that he went on his way.

"Do you observe, good mistress, the cursedness of this world? They're all out for what they can get. If this were a cask of wine or brandy then you'd see if this wagon would stay broken down so long in the middle of the road. As far as I can see, it's up to goodman Nichifor to do what's necessary. Now, let's have another try."

He started cutting another oak branch. He toiled for a while and put that one in as he had done the other. Then he whipped up the mares and had got going again when the wheel hit against a stump and the axletree broke once more!

"This time, good mistress, I'm about ready to say like that man we met that we'll spend the night in the forest."

"My God, goodman Nichifor, what's that you're saying?"

"I am saying what seems just as plain as a pikestaff to me. Look! Can't you see that the sun is sinking behind that hill and that we're stuck here? But no matter, good mistress, don't you worry, I know a clearing in the forest, quite close at hand. We'll go there and be just as snug as in our own homes. The place is sheltered and there's plenty of grazing for the mares. You'll go to sleep in the wagon, and I'll keep watch over you all night. Just you leave everything to me. The night's not tied to a fence, it'll pass as it always does. But she'll remember this mishap, will my old hag, for the rest of her days, for she alone is to blame for it all."

"Well, then, do as you know best, goodman Nichifor, only let it all be for the best."

"Come, good mistress, don't be upset. It'll all turn out right."

Then goodman Nichifor took the mares by the bridle, turned the wagon around and pulled it as best he could into the clearing.

"There now, good mistress, what a heavenly paradise this is! I wish you a long life and may you enjoy it! It's just that your sort of people are not used to all the beautiful things there are in the world. Just you jump down while there's still light to see by and let us gather some brushwood and have a fire going all night, to drive away the gnats and all the creepy-crawlers!"

Poor Malca realized that there was nothing else to do, she had no other choice. Down she got and began to gather brushwood.

"Lord, good mistress, you do it as well as if you were born to it, you seem like one of our own women. I suppose your father won't by any chance have kept a village inn anywhere ?"

"He has, the inn at Bodești, for quite a long time."

"Well now, I was wondering how you came to speak Moldavian so well and walk the way our women walk. From now on, I won't believe you're afraid of wolves. Well, how do you like it here in the clearing ? You were going to die and never know what's fine on earth. Listen to the nightingales, what fun they're having ! And the doves, how they're answering one another !"

"Goodman Nichifor, nothing will happen to us tonight, will it ? And whatever will Itic say ?"

"Itic ? He'll think he's in seventh heaven when he sees you home again. Do you think Itic knows how things can be and what can happen on the road ? Of course, he knows just about enough to let the grass grow under his feet, like that good-for-nothing old woman I've got at home. Now, good mistress, let's see if you can light a fire."

Malca arranged the twigs, goodman Nichifor struck a light, and between them they got a fire going. Then old Nichifor said :

"See how well the wood crackles, good mistress."

"I do indeed, goodman Nichifor, yet my heart's fluttering with fear !"

"Really ? God forgive me, but you might be cast in the Itic mould. Pluck up a bit of courage ! Or if you're that nervous get up into the wagon and put yourself to sleep, for the night's but one short hour, it'll soon be daylight."

Reassured by goodman Nichifor, Malca got into the wagon and lay down. Meanwhile goodman Nichifor lit his pipe, spread out his sheepskin coat and lay down on his side by the fire. He puffed at his pipe till he very nearly fell asleep, when all of a sudden a spark lit upon his nose !

"Damn. I'll bet that's a spark from the twigs Malca gathered ; it's given me an awful burn. Are you asleep, Mistress Malca ?"

"I was on the point of falling asleep, goodman Nichifor, when a host of fancies rushed into my mind and I awoke."

"Same with me. A spark lit on my nose and drove my sleep off, as though I'd slept the whole night through. To say nothing of not being able to sleep because of those madcaps, the nightingales. They're well-nigh crazy, they are. Yet now's their season for love-making. Are you asleep, good mistress?"

"I very nearly dropped off again, goodman Nichifor."

"I say, mistress, I rather think I'll put out the fire, for I've just remembered with all this din we're making that some great wolf will be on the scent and be drawn by the smoke."

"Put it out, then, do, goodman Nichifor."

So goodman Nichifor started piling earth over the fire and smothered it.

"Now sleep soundly, good mistress, for it'll soon be daylight. There now, I've put out the fire and forgotten to light my pipe. But I've got flint and steel on me. Bother the nightingales, they *are* making a night of it!"

He sat thus pondering for a while, till he'd finished his pipe, then he got up softly and walked on tip-toe to the wagon. Malca had begun gently snoring. Old Nichifor shook her gently and said:

"Mistress, mistress!"

"What is it, goodman Nichifor?" said Malca waking up in a fright.

"Do you know what I've been thinking, sitting there by the fire?"

"What, goodman Nichifor?"

"Just that when you've fallen asleep, I'll jump on one of the mares and be off home to fetch in Nicoară and the hatchet. I'll be back here by daylight."

"Alack, goodman Nichifor, what are you talking about? Do you want to find me dead with fear when you come back?"

"God forbid, mistress! Don't get frightened; it was just an idea."

"Nay, goodman Nichifor, I no longer want my sleep now. I'll get down and sit by you all night."

"You'll do nothing of the kind, good mistress, you'll stay where you are, all comfortable like, for it's a snug place you've got."

"No, I'm coming down."

Down she got and sat on the grass by goodman Nichifor. And with one thing and another, after a while they both fell asleep and slept like logs. And when they awoke it was broad daylight.

"There you are, mistress, there's the holy daylight for you! Up you get and let's see what's to be done. Nothing's eaten you up, you see. You've had nothing worse than a fright."

Listening with only half an ear, Malca fell asleep again. Meanwhile, goodman Nichifor, like the responsible man he was, got in the wagon and started rummaging in every odd corner under the hay, and suddenly... there's the hatchet, a bit of rope and a gimlet, all on the bottom of the cart!

"Oh, my sins! I wondered why the old woman would give such little heed to what I needed. Now, having slandered her in the face of God I'll take her back a red fez and a green-yellow muslin headscarf, to remind her of younger days. I must have been busy with my pipe yesterday, and still my poor old woman, whether for good or for ill, remembered what was needed on the way; only she didn't put the things in their right places. But have you known a woman who knew all her husband's ways? Mistress Malca, good mistress!"

"What is it, goodman Nichifor?"

"Will you believe this? Get up and see. I've found hatchet and rope and gimlet and everything."

"Where did you find them, goodman Nichifor?"

"Under all the baggage you piled in. They just had no voice to call out. It's like the beggar who sat on a treasure and begged for alms. A good thing I found them, though; it's the old woman, poor thing, who's sure to have put them in."

"See how wicked you've been, goodman Nichifor, piling sins on your soul like that!"

"I do, good mistress, I do see how wrong I was to slander her as I did in your hearing. From henceforth I'll sing a song to make it up with her:

Poor old woman, poor old wife,
Bring she happiness or strife,
I'll stick to her all my life!

And goodman Nichifor rolled up his sleeves and cut a beech pole and made a fine axletree. Then he fixed it beautifully, put the wheel in, harnessed the mares, and slowly and carefully made for the road, saying :

"Get in, mistress, and let's be off."

Being well fed and rested, the mares brought them to Piatra about noon.

"There, you're home now, good mistress."

"It's been none too bad in the woods either, thank Heaven for that, goodman Nichifor."

"That is so, no doubt, good mistress, but there's no place like home."

Soon they found themselves in front of Master Iţic's gates. Iţic was just coming home from school, and, on seeing Malca, he was overjoyed. But when he heard of their mishap and how they were saved from danger by Heaven's grace, he didn't know how to thank goodman Nichifor enough. Such things they gave him that he might well wonder what had befallen him.

The following day goodman Nichifor drove back with other customers. When he reached home he was so merry that his old wife couldn't figure out what had come over him to put him in such high spirits as she had not known him to be in for a long time. After this, every two or three weeks Mistress Malca came to Tîrgu Neamţ to see her parents-in-law, and she went back with goodman Nichifor, without any fear of wolves.

After one year, or after several, goodman Nichifor let out a word to a friend, over a glass of wine, about what had happened in Grumăzesti Forest and the scare Mistress Malca had had. Goodman Nichifor's friend let out a word to other friends, as friends will do, and then men, as their ways are, found a nickname for goodman Nichifor and started calling him Nichifor the Sly One, Nichifor Slyboots, just to tease him. He has, by now, long since crumbled into dust, and yet, poor man, the name of Nichifor Slyboots has stuck to him to this very day.

DĂNILĂ PREPELEAC

Once upon a time there lived in a village two brothers and both were married. The elder was industrious, careful of his own and well-to-do, for whatever he set his hand to, God's blessing was on it ; but he had no children. The younger brother was poor. Many and many a time he would shun luck and luck would shun him, for he was lazy, devoid of purpose and unmindful of his business; and he had a crowd of children too ! This poor man's wife was hard-working, and kind of heart, while the rich man's wife was mean-minded and very stingy. As the old saying goes : every ox has his own affliction.

The poor brother, poor be he of sins, had a couple of oxen, and what oxen they were ! Dove-colored hair, young, long-legged, with upstanding horns, both with white-tipped tails, a blaze between the eyes, heavy framed and wel-fed, just fit for yoking to the cart and for making a journey and getting down to work with. But as for plow, harrow, wheelbarrow, sleigh, wagon, pair of shafts, cross-beam, sickle, scythe, pitchfork, rake, and many other things needed by a good, thrifty farmer, there were none of these around the house of this worthless man. When he needed such things, he would always go and bother others, and especially his brother, who had plenty of everything. The rich man's wife would often nag the life out of her husband, to make him get his brother off his back. She would often say : "He may be your brother, but short reckonings make long friends, even between brothers."

"And what of it, woman ? Blood is thicker than water. If I don't help him, who will ?"

The woman, seeing there was nothing to be done, held her tongue and swallowed her wrath.

Apart from anything else, his cart was always out somewhere. Hardly two or three days would go by and in would pop Dănilă, her brother-in-law, asking for the cart, either to bring in wood from the forest, or flour from the mill, or stocks from the field and what not.

"Brother," the older said one day to the other, "I'm just sick of our brotherliness ! Oxen you have, why don't you

make yourself a cart, too? You've quite ruined mine. What with crash, bang here, crash, bang there, this cart will go to pieces, it will. You surely know the saying: sell your spurs and you'll kick your mare with your heels."

"You're right, brother," said the other, scratching his head, "but what shall I do?"

"What you'll do? I'll tell you. Your oxen are magnificent big ones; take them to the fair, sell them and buy a pair of smaller and cheaper ones; and with the money that's left, buy yourself a cart, and there you are, a well-to-do man."

"Now, you know, there's something in what you say. I'll do that."

So saying, he went home, took the oxen and set out with them on his way to the market. But, as I said, our man was such that the dogs would steal food out of his very bag and everything he did, he did it all wrong. The market was a good distance away and the fair was coming to an end. But whoever can stand against Dănilă Prepeleac[1]? For that was his nickname, because that was the only possession he had around the house, wrought with his own hand. He donned his furcap, pulled it down over his ears and didn't care a straw, not for Tom, Dick or Harry.

He was thus walking along with his own Dumun and Tălăşman on the way to market, when, just as he was going up a long, gentle slope, he met another man coming from market with a new cart that he had just bought and that he was wheeling with his own hands, steadying it downhill and straining at it uphill.

"Wait, friend," said our man with the oxen, which, seeing the fine, tender grass on the roadside, were tugging at the rope. "Stop a bit with your cart, I've something to say to you."

"I would and gladly, but it doesn't seem to want to stop. What is it you want to say to me?"

"Your cart seems to be bowling along on its own."

"It is, almost, don't you see?"

"Friend, you know what?"

"I will if you tell me."

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[1] *Prepeleac*: stump of a tree, with clipped branches used for hanging pots on, to dry.

"Let's strike a bargain : give me the cart and you take the oxen. I won't be burdened with them any longer : it's either hay, or pasture, or look out unless the wolf eats them, or what not. I'll be able to wheel a cart, the more so as it goes by itself."

"Are you joking, friend, or do you really mean it ?"

"No, I'm not," said Dănilă.

"Well then, I can see you're pretty shrewd," said the man with the cart. "You've found me in a good humor : here, good luck ! May you enjoy your cart and may I enjoy my oxen !"

Then he handed over the cart, took his oxen, cut across the slope towards the woods and away he went without looking back. Dănilă said to himself :

"Now, that's a good piece of business, I've treated him properly, so long as he doesn't change his mind ; he didn't look like gypsy, though, to go back on his word."

Then he took hold of his cart and set out downhill, back home.

"Whoa there, mad cart, whoa ! When I load you up with sacks of flour from the mill, then let me see you roll along like this !"

And the cart nearly, ever so nearly, ran away with him.

However after a while, the downhill road came to an end and a slope rose in front of him : when he tried to pull it uphill, do you think he could do it ? Ugh ! he tugged to the left, ugh ! he tugged to the right, but the cart slid backwards.

"There now, I've been looking for a cart and now I'm saddled with one alright."

Then with some difficulty he steered the cart to one side, brought it to a rest, sat on the shaft and began thinking.

"Well, this is a fine kettle of fish ! If I be Dănilă Prepeleac I've wasted the oxen ; and if I am not the same, then have I found a cart. It's either Prepeleac or no Prepeleac."

All of a sudden, a man came walking to market with a goat to sell.

"Friend," said Dănilă, "will you give me that goat, if I give you this cart ?"

"Well... I... my goat here is not one of those that jump over fences and she is a splendid milker."

"That's neither here nor there ; good or no good, you take the cart and give her to me."

The other agreed at once; he handed over the goat and took the cart. He then waited for other carts to come, hitched it behind them and went on his way home, leaving Dănilă agape, rooted to the spot.

"Good," said Prepeleac. "This fellow, with his goat, I've diddled him beautifully."

He then took his goat and made for the market. Yet a goat will be a goat; tugging and wrenching in all directions at once, so that Dănilă was nearly sick of her.

"I wish I could reach that market quickly and get rid of this mangy wretch."

And walking on, behold, he met a fellow coming from the market, carrying a goose in his arms.

"Good day, my good man," said Dănilă.

"Good day and God's blessing!"

"Could we make an exchange? I'll give you this goat, and you will give me the goose."

"You've got it wrong there. It's not a goose, it's a gander. I've bought it for a stock bird."

"Give me it, give me it! It's good stock I'm giving you too."

"If you give me something besides, I might let you have it; and if not, why, so much the better for the geese at home: he'll make such a bustle among them that I'll be the talk of the village."

To cut a long story short, what with one thing and another, one offering a little more and the other coming down a bit, Prepeleac gave the goat away! Then he seized the gander and walked on to the market. When he got there, the gander, eager for geese, was honking as loud as he could: Ga, ga, ga, ga!

"There! Rid of the devil and burdened with his sire; this bird's deafening me. I'll get you off my hands quick, you quarrelsome brute!"

And passing by a merchant who was selling bags he bartered the gander for a flat-bottomed bag with long bands to tie around the neck. He took the bag, turned and twisted it and surveyed it on all sides, and then he said: "Now you've made a hash of it! you started with a pair of oxen that it did one's heart good to look at, and you're left with an empty bag. Oh my, oh my, oh my! It's not the first time I've been out on my own, but it's as if the devil had clean taken my wits away."

He lingered for a while idling about the market and then he made his way home, and reaching the village, he went straight to his brother's to bring him joy.

"Hello, brother!"

"Welcome, brother Dănilă. You've been a long time at the market!"

"You said it, brother; I left in a hurry and had to dawdle."

"Well, and what news have you brought from the market?"

"None too good, brother! It's as though my poor oxen had disappeared down the wolf's throat."

"Has some wild animal attacked them, or has anyone stolen them?"

"No, I've given them away with my own hands, brother."

Then he told the whole story, where he had been and what had befallen him; and in the end he said:

"And to make a long story short, out of a pair of oxen I'm now left with a bag which just reeks of emptiness."

"I'll not mince my words, brother, you're a blockhead."

"Now, brother, so far things have gone their own way, but from now on, I've learned my lesson. Only what's the use?

When the brain's working well,
There's nothing to sell;
When cheeses abound,
No tubs can be found.

There, you may have this bag, for I have no use for it, and I beg you, lend me the cart and the oxen just this once, so that I may bring some wood from the forest for my wife and children, for there's not a spark of fire in their grate, poor things! And then be it as God will. I hope I won't trouble you again."

"Shame on you," said his brother when he heard him out. "God must have filled this world with whatever he could. There, I'll give you the cart once more, but this will be the last time."

That was enough for Dănilă. He took his brother's cart and oxen and set out. When he reached the wood, he singled out a great big tree, and drew the cart up to it, and without unyoking the oxen, he started hacking away at the tree, so that it would fall right into the cart. What things happened

to Dănilă Prepeleac! He hacked away for a little while, when crash! the tree fell on top of the cart and knocked it to pieces, and on top of the oxen and killed them!

"There! Now I've brought calamity on my brother too. Well, what's to be done? I think a good job is never a bad one; Dănilă's done it. Dănilă will have to undo it; I'll go and see if perhaps I'll be able to get my brother to lend me the mare too, so that I can flee with it into the wide world, and leave my wife and children in God's care."

So saying, he set off, but while walking through the forest he lost his way; after much trouble and confusion, instead of finding the way, he came upon a pond and seeing some ducks on the water, he hurled his axe at them with a mighty whirl meaning to kill one and take it as a present to his brother. Yet the ducks, being neither blind nor deaf, flew off, and the axe sank to the bottom and Prepeleac stood there with a long face.

"I say! I have had bad luck today! What a disastrous day! It's clear that someone has put an evil spell on me."

Then he shrugged his shoulders and went off. He walked a while until, with great difficulty, he found the road. He then took to his heels and soon he came running to his brother's house in the village and forthwith blurted out a lie as fitting as a square peg in a round hole.

"Brother, do you think you could let me have the mare too, so that I might sit on her back and drive the oxen? It's been raining heavily in the forest and it's so muddy and slippery, you can hardly stand on your feet."

"My word!" said his brother, "it's plain you were cut out to be a splendid hermit and not for living among humans, to be a nuisance to your fellow-men and a burden to your wife and children. Come, take off and get going to the end of nowhere, where the deaf man rode his wheel and the dumb man left his mare, that I may never hear your name again!"

And the mare? Leave that to Dănilă! For he knew where he'd take it. To get the oxen's blessing and wish farewell to the cart. Then he walked out by the door, grabbed the mare and a hatchet and off he went!

When his brother looked around, where do you imagine the mare was? Prepeleac was already at the pond in the

forest, looking for the axe. There it suddenly dawned on Dănilă that he'd be well-suited to be a hermit, just as his brother had said.

"I'll raise a cloister in this clearing that will be the talk of the world," he said.

There and then he set to it. He first fashioned a cross and stuck it into the ground to mark the spot. Then he went through the woods, singling out the necessary trees: this one's right for the corner pillars, that one for the main posts, this for the beams, this for props, that for joists, this one for the *toacă* [1], and thus always muttering to himself, lo and behold! he found himself face to face with a devil, just out of the pond.

"What do you propose to do here, my good man?"

"Can't you see for yourself?"

"Just a moment, brother, don't start any tomfoolery here. The pond, the ground, and the woods around here belong to us."

"Maybe you'll say the ducks on the water are yours too and my own hatchet at the bottom of the pond. Wait and I'll teach you to grab at the things of this world, you horned devil."

The devil, seeing there was no dealing with him, plop! into the pond he dived and informed Scaraoschi [2] about this godfearing man with devilish ways. What were the devils to do? They put their heads together and Scaraoschi, the head-devil, had the idea of sending one of them with a buffalo hide full of money to give to Dănilă the hermit, to persuade him to go away.

"Here, you, there's money for you!" said the devil-messenger, "and clear out of here or else it'll be the worse for you!"

Prepeleac looked at the cross, looked at the devil and the money, shrugged his shoulders and said:

"You're lucky, you scum of the earth, that I'd rather have the money than a hermit's life, or I'd show you something!"

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[1] *Toacă*: longish flat piece of wood, which is tapped with a hammer, as a summons to service in Greek Orthodox churches. It may also be made of iron.

[2] *Scaraoschi*: chief of the devils: Lucifer.

The devil answered :

"Don't you set yourself up against the Emperor of Hell, but instead take your money and look after your own business."

He then left the money and went back into the pond where he found Scaraoschi much grieved at the loss of so large a treasure, by means of which he might have won a host of souls. Prepeleac, meanwhile, was racking his brains as to how he might get the money home.

"Good," said Dănilă, "that's not something you pick up on everywhere. It's cloisters you've got to build if you want the devils to take notice of you and come and lay wealth at your feet and make you rolling in money."

As he was considering how to get the money home, behold ! another devil from the pond came before him, saying :

"I say fellow ! My master's changed his mind. He wants us to have a test of strength first, and only then can you have the money."

"There's the rub," Prepeleac said to himself, heaving a sigh. But as the saying goes : a rich man's got sense and a young man's got looks. Dănilă had now got some sense.

"Try our strength did you say ? Well, how ?"

"Here's how : the first trial is, that he who will put your mare upon his back and run around the pond three times, without once setting it down and taking a breath, he'll be the one who takes the money !"

No sooner said than done. The devil forthwith up ! and hoisted the mare on his back and ran around the pond three times in a jiffy.

On seeing such strength, Prepeleac was none too pleased, but he kept his wits about him and said :

"Now, Mickey-imp ! I gave you credit for being stronger than you are. You took the mare upon your back, didn't you ? Well, I'll just take her between my knees."

And straightaway he jumped upon the mare's back and went three times around the pond without stopping for breath. Then the devil, mightly surprised at this and having no answer to give, thought of something else.

"Now let's race one another," he said.

"Mickey-imp, is it me you think you can beat at running ?"

"Well, who else?"

"Come here and I'll show you who else."

He went with the devil into a patch of bushes, where he saw a hare sleeping, and pointed it out to him.

"Can you see someone tiny squatting down there?"

"Yes."

"That's my youngest child. Get ready! And when I've woken him, run after him." And all of a sudden he shouted: "Hey! shoo! shoo!"

The hare leaped off and the devil went after it. They ran for a while, but before long the devil lost the hare's track. So far, everyone had laughed at Prepeleac, but now it was he who was laughing at the devil himself. While Dănilă was holding his sides with laughter at the devil's folly, behold! the devil came back panting.

"My, such a quick and nimble child you've got, my word! Just as I was about to lay my hand on him, I lost track of him and off he shot like lightning."

"Takes after his father, good fellow," Dănilă said. "Well now, do you still want to race me?"

"You won't catch me at that game! Let's try wrestling."

"Wrestling? perhaps you're weary of life! Listen; I've heard old men say that devils are no fools; yet, as far as I can see, you're so thick-headed, it's beyond belief. Now listen, I've got an old uncle nine hundred and ninety-nine years and fifty-two weeks old. If you can floor him, then you might try me too, but I think you'll have had enough!"

So saying, he set out first, motioning to the devil to come after him. In the depth of the woods under some rocks there was a lair of bears that Prepeleac had come across when he had been out in search of new green shoots and wild raspberries. When they were near to it, Dănilă said:

"Here, this is my uncle's den. Walk in, you'll find him sleeping among the cinders, with his nose in the embers. He can't speak, for his teeth fell out more than a thousand years ago."

The devil, you well know what he does when he has nothing better to do! In he walked, and started brushing the old man's nose with that curly tail of his. That was all Mister Bear wanted, and leave the rest to him! He suddenly jumped out of his den in a rage and snap! grabbing the devil, he hugged him and squeezed him with such might

that the devil nearly gave up his ghost, poor thing, and his eyes bulged out of his head, as big as onions.

"There ! no sonner sought than found" said Dănilă, who was watching the scuffle from afar and shaking with laughter. I don't quite know what the devil did, but he did something, and with much difficulty got out of Mister Bear's clutches. Dănilă, as soon as he saw the devil come out safe and sound, feigned to lend him a hand.

"Come, come, I'll have none of your audacity ! You knew very well what a rough customer your grandfather was. Why ever did you prompt me to fight him ?"

"How's that ? Didn't you like it ? Now try me !"

"With you and you alone I'll compete in bellowing : and he who yells the loudest, let him take the money."

"Good," said Dănilă to himself, "I'll shout you hoarse, I will ! Mickey-imp, you shout first and let me hear how much noise you make !"

So the devil stood straddling with one leg west and another east, clung tight to the hinges of the sky, opened his mouth as wide as a house. No sooner had he shouted than the earth shook, the village resounded, the seas bubbled up and the fish were terribly frightened ; the devils scurried out of the pond as thick as leaves and grass ! And the vault of heaven all but crumbled away. Dănilă, however, sat beside the hideful of money and keeping quite cool, said :

"My, you can only shout as loud as that ? I hardly heard you. Shout again !"

The devil shouted again, more mightily.

"I still haven't heard you. Try again !"

The devil shouted a third time, so loud, you'd have thought something snapped within him.

"That time I didn't hear you at all ! Now it's my turn, isn't it ?"

"It is indeed."

"Well, Mickey-imp, when I shout, you'll go deaf, your brains will be blown clean out of your head. Do you understand ? Yet I mean well, if you'll only listen to me."

"What will I do ?"

"Just let me tie a towel around your eyes and ears if you want to stay alive."

"Tie me as you like and with whatever you like, only don't let me die !"

Then Dănilă bound the devil's eyes and ears tight with an oakum towel as if for playing "pin the tail on the donkey", then he got hold of a heavy oak club, for hermit though he was, Dănilă would rather trust the oak club than the holy cross, and he gave the devil a terrific wallop on his right ear!

"Ow... ow! That'll do, stop shouting!"

"Not on your life! You wait Old Harry! You shouted three times, didn't you?"

Then he gave the devil an enormous crack on his left ear!

"Ow! ow! That'll do!"

"No, it won't." And he gave him another bang, in the name of the Father!

The devil shrieked dreadfully, and blindfolded as he was, wailing and writhing like a snake, he plunged into the pond, telling Scaraoschi what had befallen him, and assured him that there was no joking with this wizard.

Dănilă, however, heaved sigh after sigh beside the hideful of money, battling with thoughts as to what was to be done? When lo, and behold, a third devil sprang up before him, a mighty hammer in his hand, which he flung on the ground, saying:

"Here, my friend! Now let me see what you're made of! Let him who swings the hammer highest have the money!"

"There you are, Dănilă," he said to himself, "You're a bit flustered, aren't you?" Yet, as the saying goes: Need will teach you what to do.

"You throw it first, devil!"

Then the devil seized the hammer by the handle and when he hurled it, it soared so high that it was lost from sight: and three days and nights later, falling down with great clatter, it sank into the bowels of the earth and shook its very foundations.

"Now you hurl it," the devil said, full of conceit.

"I'll hurl it, don't you worry; but get it out first on the ground, as you found it!"

The devil obeyed and got it out.

"Go on, hurry up, quick, I can't wait."

"Wait a while, you Tartar, you've no children clinging to your skirts."

The devil agreed, having no choice. After a while, daylight departed. The sky was clear and the flashing planets

were laughing at the stars, while the moon, peeping over hill tops, was swinging on high, flooding the earth with light.

"Well, aren't you going to throw it, fellow?"

"Oh, yes I am, in good time, but I want to tell you to say goodbye to it."

"Why should I?"

"I'll tell you why. Don't you see some spots yonder on the moon?"

"I do."

"Those are my brothers in that world. And Lord, aren't they in need of iron to shoe their horses with. Just look hard and see how they're beckoning to me to give them the hammer." And he suddenly grabbed it.

"Wait, you half-wit, this hammer has been handed down to us by our ancestors and we can't give it away, not for the world." And forthwith he snatched the hammer out of Dănilă's hand and rushed with it into the pond, telling Scaraoschi what was to have befallen him in the matter of the hammer. At this, Scaraoschi, worried and angry beyond measure, summoned all devildom and stamped his foot, shouting:

"Now, this minute, let one of you step forth and go and damn this unhallowed and cursed foe."

Forthwith one devil stepped up before him, trembling.

"Your Vileness! I'll go and do your impious bidding."

"Do so, and if you're clever and do well, know that I'll raise you in rank."

Then the devil started foaming with rage and reached the hermit Dănilă in a twinkling.

"My good fellow," the devil said, "you and your tricks have set all the devil's brood afire; now I am going to give you hell. Come, let's curse each other and he who proves ablest will have the money!" And so the devil forthwith began to mumble and chant so that somehow or other one of Dănilă's eyes burst in its socket! Poor old Prepeleac! Maybe he was doomed to pay for the sin of his brother's mare, of the goat, of the betrothed gander, and of the oxen killed in the woods. Maybe the curse of the widowed geese had fallen upon him!

For great is the ordeal of a real hermit when he forsakes worldly lusts and dwells on holy deeds! Prepeleac, the hermit, was now at loggerheads with the devil.

And then what is more tender than the eye? Dănilă's head was splitting with pain, yet, no matter how keen the pain, he held his own and said :

"You won't scare me with that sort of trick, you filthy fiend, you. I'll make you rue the day when you were born, I will, for the rest of your life !"

"Come, come, stop mumbling under your breath and now take your turn at cursing, so that I can see how clever you are at it."

"You'll take the hideful of money on your shoulder and come to my house, for I haven't got the ancestral curses by me. Agreed ?"

No sooner said than done ; Dănilă settled himself on the hideful, while the devil shoved them on to his back and flew as quick as thought right to Dănilă Prepeleac's house.

His children and his wife, upon seeing a bull flying on high, took to their heels, much frightened, but Dănilă began calling them by their names and they, knowing his voice, stopped running.

"Father's darling sons ! Come here and bring the ancestral curses with you : the carder and the combs to card the oakum."

The boys began to crowd in from all sides, parental curses in hand. Dănilă was now going to give some of his own back.

"Get hold of this fellow, children, and start cursing him as heartily as you can and let him have a good time of it."

And so, leave it to the children, for they'll put the devil to flight. They all fell on the devil and racked him after Dănilă's own heart. And the devil started yelling at the top of his voice ; and painfully slipping out of their hands, scratched and beaten black and blue, he left money and went back to hell, after the others.

While Dănilă Prepeleac, no longer molested by anyone and having risen about hardships, ate and drank and feasted far into his old age, living to see the sons of his sons seated around his table.

THE TALE OF THE PIG

The story goes that there once lived an old woman and an old man ; the old man was a hundred and the old woman was ninety, and both these old people were as white as the winter and as glum as foul weather, because they had no children. And Lord ! much did they yearn for one, because throughout the whole mortal day and night they sat as lonesome as the cuckoo, as bored as bored could be.

Besides, there was not much else for them to do. A wretched, miserable hut, some tattered carpets laid on benches, and that was the sum of their belongings. Latterly, moreover, boredom was positively eating into them, for not a living soul ever crossed their threshold ; they might as well have been laid up with the plague, poor things !

One day the old woman heaved a heavy sigh and said to the old man :

"Lord, husband, we've been living in this world a long time, but no one has yet called us father and mother ! It seems a shame that we should go on living in the world, for a childless household is not worthy of God's mercy !"

"What of it, my dear ! What can we do if such be God's will ?"

"You're right, husband, I can see that, but I've something to say to you now. Do you know what I was thinking about last night ?"

"I'll know, wife, if you'll tell me."

"Well, tomorrow morning, at daybreak, you'll get up and set out and follow your nose ; and whatever crosses your path first, be it man, or snake, or any other kind of creature, slip it into your bag and bring it home. We'll bring it up as well as we can and that will be our child."

Sick of so much loneliness and anxious to have a child about the house, the old man got up with the sun, hitched his bag on to his stick and did as the old woman had bidden him. Out he set and walked straight on along some hilly paths until he came to a puddle. And there in the puddle, behold! a sow with twelve suckling pigs, sprawling in the mud and sunning themselves in the sun. As soon as she saw the old

man coming upon her, the sow started grunting and ran away with the sucklings after her. Only one, who was thin, mangy and sickly too, unable to get out of the mud, was left behind.

The old man seized him at once, thrust him into his bag, as full of filth and other finery as he was, and set off for home with him.

"Praise be to God!" the old man said, "if only I may bring the old woman some comfort! For who can tell? Maybe it was God, or maybe it was the devil, that put such a thing into her mind last night."

And on reaching home he said: "There, wife, see what a treasure I've brought you! I wish you joy of it! Such a wide-eyed, curving-browed, pretty lad you've never seen! He's like you, your very image! Now get the lye ready and tend him as you know boys should be tended, for as you see he's somewhat bedraggled, poor mite!"

"Husband, husband, don't you jeer," said the old woman, "for he's God's creature too, as well as we are, and maybe more innocent, poor dear!"

Then, light-footed as a girl, she soon got the lye ready, prepared the bath-tub, and like a competent midwife, she took the pig, bathed him, gently rubbed his joints with oil from the rushlight, squeezed his nose and clucked at him to keep the evil eye off her treasure! She then brushed and tended him so well that within a few days she got him over all his troubles; and what with bran and peelings the pig began to pick up and grow under their very eyes so that it did one's heart good to see him. And the old woman couldn't keep her joy within bounds at having a boy so good-looking, so full of fun, plump and round like a melon. Had all the world told her that he was ugly and impudent, she would have held to her own opinion that her boy was peerless! One thing, however, lay heavy on the old woman's heart: that he couldn't call them father and mother.

One day the old man was getting ready to go to town to buy a few things.

"Husband," said the old woman, "don't forget to bring some candy for this boy of ours, for he's sure to be longing for some, the little darling!"

"Right you are, wife." But to himself he said: "Bother his hog's snout! Keeps on pestering me about him! I only wish we had bread and salt enough to keep body and soul

together, let alone cramming him with dainties. If I took the old crone to her word in all things, I might as well clear off!" Be that as it may, the old man went to town, bought whatever had to be bought and when he came home, his wife asked him as usual :

"Well, husband, what's the news in town ?"

"Well, wife, what should it be ? The news is none too good. The emperor wants to marry his daughter off."

"And is that bad news, husband ?"

"Just wait a minute, wife, for that's not all. My hair stood on end at the news. And when I've told you all, I think you'll have goose-bumps all over."

"But why, husband ? God help us !"

"Here's why, wife, just listen to this. The emperor has heralded from abroad that to anyone who can build a golden bridge from his own house to the royal palace, a bridge paved with precious stones and bordered with all kinds of trees on both sides and in those trees all sorts of birds singing, whose like is not to be found in this world, he will give his daughter and half his empire with her. But if anyone ventures to come and seek her for his bride and fails to build the bridge exactly as I have told you, he shall have his head cut off on the spot. And they say so far a great many sons of kings and emperors have come — God knows whence — and none of them has achieved anything ; and the emperor has had them all ruthlessly beheaded, just as he had determined, so that everybody is weeping with pity for them. Now, what do you say, wife ? Are these good things ? The emperor himself, they say, has sickened with sadness !"

"Alas, husband, don't worry ! Sickness in emperors is healthy for us ! But for those emperors' sons and what you told me about them, my heart does bleed, for great are their mother's yearning and sorrow for them ! A good thing our own son can't talk and that his head won't carry him to much length."

"That's good enough, woman ; yet would it be no mean thing to have a son who'd build the bridge and marry the emperor's daughter, for that man would surely rise above difficulties, and Lord wouldn't he win great honor in the world !"

As the old couple were talking, the pig lay in his resting-place, in a recess under the hearth, his snout raised, gazing

into their eyes ; he was listening to what was said and just occasionally wheezed through his nose. And as the old people were discussing these things with each other, lo ! What should they hear from under the hearth, but : "Father and mother I'll build it."

The old woman swooned for joy : the old man, however, was frightened thinking it was the evil one and, much amazed, he was looking on every side to see where the voice had come from ; but seeing nobody, he came to himself a little. The pig, however, cried out again :

"Don't be afraid, father, it's only me ! Bring mother around and go to the emperor to tell him that I'll build his bridge."

The old man then stammered :

"But do you think you'll be able to, sonny ?"

"Don't you worry about that, father, you can rely on me. You just go and tell the emperor what I've said !"

The old woman, then, coming out of her swoon, kissed the boy and said :

"Mother's own darling ! Don't you risk your head ! And don't you leave us right now lonely, sore in heart and helpless."

"Don't worry, mother dear, not a bit, for by living and not dying, you shall see who I am."

Then, the old man, unable to say more, combed his beard neatly, picked up his staff, the prop of his old age, walked out of the house and set off for the Court. As soon as he reached the town he went bravely to the emperor's palace. A guard seeing the old man standing there, asked him :

"What's your wish, old fellow ?"

"I've got a word to say to the emperor ; my son wagers he'll build the bridge."

Knowing what the orders were, the guard didn't ask more questions, but took the old man into the emperor's presence. Seeing the old man, the emperor asked him :

"What is it you want of me, old man ?"

"Long may you live in peace and plenty, all powerful majesty ! My son, hearing that you wish to give your daughter away in marriage, sends me to inform your Majesty on his behalf that he, so he says, will build your bridge."

"Let him do it, if he's able to, old man, and then my daughter and half my empire shall be his. And if not, then...

maybe you've heard how others, of nobler blood than he, have fared? If you'll have it so, then go and bring your son here. If not, look to your own affairs and don't gape about with your head full of wild fancies."

Upon hearing these things from the emperor's own mouth the old man bowed to the ground; then he left and made for home to fetch his son. And when he reached home, he told his son what the emperor had said. At this the pig very joyfully began to frolic about the hut, rushed under the chests, upset a few pots with his snout, then said:

"Come, dear father, let the emperor see me."

Then the old woman started wailing and said:

"It's plain, there's nothing left for me in the world! Up to now I've toiled to bring him up and get him out of difficulties; and now... I'm sure I won't see him again!" And thus wailing, she fainted with grief.

But the old man stuck to his word: he put his fur cap on his head, pulled it down over his ears, took his staff in his hand and said:

"Come sonny, let's bring your mother a daughter-in-law!"

The pig had one more joyful romp under the chests, then followed the old man, walking close behind him, grunting and nuzzling upon the ground as pigs do.

They had hardly reached the gates of the royal palace when the guards, on seeing them, started looking at each other and chuckling.

"And what might this be, old fellow?" said one.

"This is my son who is going to build the emperor's bridge."

"Lord, old fellow, you're sorely in need of brains," said an older guard. "Maybe you're tired of life."

"Well, whatever is ordained for a man is written upon his brow; and we shall all die the same death."

"As far as we can see, old man, you're looking for trouble, with a candle in broad daylight too," the guards said.

"Now, that's not your business; better hold your tongue and tell the emperor that we're here," answered the old man.

The guards then looked at one another and shrugged their shoulders. One of them, then, told the emperor of the arrival of the new suitors. The old man and his pig! So the emperor called them before him. When he came in, the old man bowed to the ground and stood meekly by the door

While the pig stepped forth across the carpets grunting and started nosing about the palace.

Seeing such impertinence the emperor felt half mirthful, half troubled and said :

"I say, old fellow, when you were here last, you seemed to be in your right mind ; but now what are you dreaming about that you should bring pigs along with you ? Who has prompted you to make fun of me, of all people ?"

"God forbid, your Highness, that I should be thinking of such a thing at my time of life. And begging your Highness's pardon, this is the son I told you about the other day who had sent me to your Highness — if you remember."

"And is he going to build the bridge ?"

"So we hope, with God's help, that he will, your Highness !"

"Come, take your pig and get out, and if by tomorrow morning the bridge is not ready, old fellow, your head shall lie at your feet. Is that clear ?"

"Merciful is Lord, your Worship. And should things happen according to your Highness's wish, well then send us the maid home."

And so saying he bowed low, as was his custom, picked up his pig, walked out, and made for home, followed by some soldiers whom the emperor had appointed to keep watch over him and see what it might all be about. For such unheard of brazen behavior had raised much talk, much laughter, and great bewilderment everywhere.

And so, towards evening, the old man and his pig having reached home, the old woman began to shake with fear and she started moaning and saying :

"Good God, husband ! What trouble have you brought home upon me ? Do I need soldiers in the house ?"

"And you've got the face to ask ? It's all your doing ; I followed your stupid fancy and went up hill and down dale to bring you a foster-child. And see what trouble we've got into ! For I haven't brought the soldiers, but they've brought me. And as to my head, it was perhaps fated to stand where it does only until tomorrow morning !"

The pig however was rootling about the house in quest of food and didn't care a bit about the trouble he had wrought. The old people wrangled for a while and then — anxious though they were — they fell asleep towards daybreak. The pig then carefully climbed upon the bench, broke the window

and suddenly wheezing through his nose, two cylinders of fire suddenly appeared, stretching from the old man's hut, which was now a hut no longer, right up to the emperor's palace. And the bridge with everything required now stood ready. While the old man's hut was turned into a palace, more splendid by far than the emperor's own!

All of a sudden the old woman and the old man woke up clothed in imperial purple and all the dainties in the world were now in their palace. While the pig was frolicking and sprawling about on carpets spread out everywhere.

At the same time there were great happenings at court too; and the emperor himself together with his counselors, seeing this great wonder, were shocked beyond measure! And fearing lest some evil should befall him, the emperor held council and found it fitting to give his daughter in marriage to the old man's son, and he sent her to him right away. For the emperor himself — emperor though he was — had put now all his eggs in one basket, and no good basket at that; it held *fear*!

Wedding there was none, for who was there to wed? As she reached the bridegroom's house, the emperor's daughter was delighted with the palace and her parents-in-law, but when she set eyes on the bridegroom, she was stunned; but presently she shrugged her shoulders and said in her own heart:

"Since that was my parents' and God's will with me, so be it!" And she started housekeeping.

The pig nosed about all day, as was his custom, but at night, on going to bed, he took off the pig's skin and turned into an emperor's son, and a mighty handsome one too! And it was not long before his wife got used to him and no longer disliked him as she had done at first.

A week or two later, the young empress, feeling homesick, went to visit her parents; her husband she left behind, for she hadn't the face to go out into the world with him. Her parents rejoiced greatly at seeing her and when they asked her about her husband and her home, she told them all that was to tell.

The emperor then began to counsel her saying:

"My child, don't cause him any unpleasantness. God forbid, lest some misfortune befall you! For as far as I can judge, this man, or whatever he may be, has great power.

And he must be something beyond our understanding since he has achieved deeds far above what any human being can perform !"

After this, both empresses walked out into the garden for some air. And here the mother counseled her daughter in quite another way :

"My child, what sort of a life you lead if you cannot walk abroad with your husband ? This is my advice to you : see to it that there is always a good fire burning in the stove, and when your husband falls asleep, take that pig's hide and throw it into the fire to burn, and then you'll be rid of it !"

"Now, that's bravely spoken, mother ; it would not have entered my head to do that !"

And as soon as the young empress reached home, she had a blazing fire lit in the stove, and when her husband was sound asleep, she took the pig's skin from where he had laid it and threw it into the fire ! The hairs upon it began to crackle and the skin to sizzle, turning into burnt crackling and ashes, and the room was filled with such a filthy stench, that her husband woke up in a fright, sprang to his feet and peered into the stove in great dismay. Seeing this great misfortune, he wept and said :

"Alas, you thoughtless woman ! What have you done ? If anyone put it into your head, it was evil advice, and if of your own devising, it was an evil deed !"

Then she suddenly found herself girdled with a mighty iron hoop around her waist, and her husband said to her :

"When I put my right arm round your waist, then shall this hoop burst and then only shall a child be born to you, for you have acted according to other people's advice and brought misfortune upon the heads of these unhappy old people, and led both me and yourself into trouble. If you ever need me, know that my name is Prince Charming, and look for me at the Cloister of Incense."

As soon as he had finished speaking, a great wind arose, and a dreadful whirlwind swept the emperor's son-in-law up into the air and he vanished from sight. Then the wonderful bridge forthwith broke and vanished, leaving no trace behind, while the palace in which the old people and their daughter-in-law lived, with all its riches and wonders, changed back into the old man's former humble hut. Upon which the old folks, seeing great misfortune and their daughter-in-law in

great dismay, began to chide her tearfully and speak to her sharply, telling her to go wherever she wanted, for they were unable to support her.

She being thus unhappy and forsaken, what should she do and where should she turn? Should she go to her parents? She feared her father's wrath and the people's scoffing and slanderous tongues; should she stay where she was? She was deprived of the necessities of life and sick of her parents-in-law's rebukes.

At long last she made up her mind to go into the wide world and look for her husband. And having thus decided, she said: "God be with me!" and set out to wherever her feet would carry her. And she walked and walked right on across a wilderness, for a whole year, until she reached a savage and utterly strange place. And there she saw a small cottage overgrown with moss, a token of its old age; she knocked upon the door. The voice of an old woman was heard from within, saying:

"Who's there?"

"It's me, a traveler who has lost her way."

"If you are good, then draw near my cell; and if you are wicked, then keep away from this place, for I've got a bitch with teeth of steel, and if I let her loose, she'll tear you into a thousand pieces."

"I am a good person, mother!"

Then the gate opened and the traveler walked in.

"And what wind has blown you hither, and how did you pick your way through these parts, my good woman? For no magic bird comes this way, much less human being."

Then the traveler heaved a heavy sigh and said:

"It's my sins, good mother, that have driven me hither. I'm looking for the Cloister of Incense, and I don't know where it lies!"

"It looks as if you still had a bit of luck left, since you've come right here. I am Holy Wednesday, if you've ever heard my name."

"Your name I've heard, good mother, but that you are of this world, never crossed my mind."

"There you are. And people complain of bad luck!"

Then Holy Wednesday gave a loud call and forthwith all the living things within her realm came together; and upon her asking them about the Cloister of Incense, they all ans-

wered in one voice that they had never even heard of its name. On hearing this, Holy Wednesday looked very downcast, but, unable to do anything, she gave the traveler a cake and a goblet of wine, to keep up her strength on the way, and gave her, also, a golden distaff which spun its own thread unaided, and said to her gently : "Keep it, for it might serve you in good stead." She then directed her to her elder sister, Holy Friday.

And the traveler setting out, again walked a whole year, across waste and unknown lands, until with great toil and trouble she reached Holy Friday. There she met with the same luck she had had with Holy Wednesday. Only Holy Friday gave her another cake, another goblet of wine and a golden reel that did its own winding, and she too directed her, most kindly and graciously, to her elder sister, Holy Sunday. And starting out the very same day, the traveler again walked another year, across wildernesses, still more desolate than those she had already crossed. And she being heavy with child, for three long years now, it was with great difficulty that she reached Holy Sunday's abode. Holy Sunday received her in the same way and just as kindly as her sisters. Holy Sunday too shouted with all her might and forthwith all the living things drew together, those living in water, on dry land and in the air. She conjured them at all costs to tell her whether any of them knew in what part of the world lay the Cloister of Incense. And they all answered, as if with one voice, that they hadn't ever even heard of it. So Holy Sunday sighed from the depths of her heart, gave the unhappy traveler a pitying look and said :

"It looks like God's wrath or some such thing, that severs you from that which you're looking for, my child ! For this is the bourne of a land as yet unknown even to me ; and however much you or anyone else might try to go further, it is beyond hope."

At this lo and behold, a lame lark was seen in the distance hurrying for the life of him ; and limp ! limp ! limp ! he stood before Holy Sunday. So she asked him too :

"Now, lark, don't you know where the Cloister of Incense lies ?"

"Of course I do, mistress, why shouldn't I ? That's where heartache and longing drove me and where I had my leg broken."

"If that's how things stand then take this woman and lead her there as best you know and advise her as best you can."

Then the lark heaved a sigh and humbly answered :

"I'll do your Highness' bidding wholeheartedly, good mistress, though it's very hard work to walk there."

Then Holy Sunday gave the traveler a cake and a goblet of wine to keep up her strength until she reached the Cloister of Incense ; and she gave her a large golden tray too and a hen, all gold and studded with precious stones, with chickens of gold too, to stand her in good stead in her hour of need ; then she placed her in the lark's care, who forthwith set out, limping. Now the lark walked and the traveler rode, now she walked and the lark rode, and when the poor traveler could no longer either walk or ride, then the lark lifted her upon its little wings and carried her. And thus they traveled for another year with much trouble and exhaustion, over innumerable lands and seas, across forests and terrible wildernesses, teeming with monsters, venomous serpents, the evil-eyed basilisk, twenty-four-headed otters and countless terrifying insects and monsters waiting openmouthed, ready to swallow them up ; of their greed, cunning and malice human tongue cannot tell.

And at last, after such trouble and danger, with great difficulty, they succeeded in reaching the mouth of a cavern. Here the traveler again climbed on the lark's wings, which by now he could hardly flap : and he plunged with her into another world, which was paradise, no other !

"There is the Cloister of Incense," said the lark. That's where Prince Charming dwells, whom you've been looking for through such a waste of years. Does anything look familiar round here ?" Then although her eyes were dazzled with so many wonders, she looked around carefully and forthwith she recognized the wonderful bridge of that other world and the palace she had lived in for so short a time, with Prince Charming, and straight away her eyes filled with tears of joy.

"Wait a little and don't rejoice so soon, for you're still at the mercy of wicked people in these places, and not yet free of dangers," said the lark.

He then pointed out a well to her, whither she was to go three days running ; he told her whom she was going to meet and what to say, he advised her what to do with the distaff and the reel, with the tray and the golden hen, and

the golden chickens, all given to her by the three sisters : Holy Wednesday, Holy Friday, and Holy Sunday.

Then taking leave of the traveler entrusted to him, he quickly turned back, flying ceaselessly, for fear of having his other leg broken. While the traveler left all alone watched him in his flight with tearful eyes, as she walked to the well he had pointed out.

When she reached the well, she first brought out the distaff from where she had put it away, and then sat down to rest.

Not long after, a servant came to fetch water and on seeing a strange woman and the wonderful distaff spinning by itself golden threads a thousand times finer than hair, she hurried away to her mistress and told her !

The mistress of this servant was the witch who had turned the devil white, now a housekeeper in Prince Charming's palace, a mighty witch who could curdle waters and had a good knowledge of all the devilish tricks in the world. Yet one thing alone the old witch did not know : a man's desires. On hearing of such wonder, the wicked old witch sent her servant immediately to call that strange women to the palace, and as soon as she set eyes on her she said :

"I hear that you've got a golden distaff which will spin by itself. Is it for sale, and how much would you ask for it, good woman ?"

"Just that you let me spend one night in the room where the emperor lies."

"Why not ? Just give me the distaff and stay here until nightfall when the emperor comes home from hunting."

So the traveler handed over the distaff and stayed there. The toothless old witch, knowing that the emperor was in the habit of drinking a cup of fresh milk every night, now prepared one for him to make him sleep like a log until morning.

As soon as the emperor came back from hunting and got into bed, the old witch instantly sent him the milk ; and as soon as the emperor drank it, he there and then fell asleep like one dead.

Then the old witch called the unknown traveler into the emperor's room as they had agreed, and left her there, saying softly :

"Sit here until daybreak, and I shall then come to fetch you myself."

It was not for the emperor's sake that the old witch was whispering and treading softly, but she was careful lest she should be overheard by a faithful servant of the emperor's next-door who went hunting with him every day.

And as soon as the old witch had left, the unhappy traveler knelt by her husband's bed and began to cry bitterly and said :

"Prince Charming ! Prince Charming ! Put your right arm around my waist, that this cursed hoop may burst and your son be born !"

The poor soul thus cried until daybreak, but in vain, for the emperor seemed to be in some other world !

At daybreak, the old witch came along very sullenly, fetched the stranger and told her spitefully to get out in the courtyard and walk where her legs would take her. So the unfortunate woman, driven out without warning and as sorrowful as could be, returned to the well and now took out the reel. And the servant coming for water and seeing this great new wonder, ran swiftly to her mistress and told her that the woman who had been there on the previous day now had a golden reel that wound by itself, far more wonderful than the distaff she had given her. Then the wicked witch sent for her again, secured the reel by means of the same crafty trick, and early next morning again fetched her out of the emperor's room and drove her out of the courtyard.

That night, however, the emperor's trusty man guessing what had come to pass, and taking pity on the unhappy stranger made up his mind to discover what the old woman was up to.

So, as soon as the emperor rose and set out hunting, the trusty fellow told him in detail what had been happening in his room during those two last nights.

Upon hearing this the emperor gave a sudden start as if his heart had leapt into his mouth. Then he cast down his eyes and began to weep. And while tears were streaming down his cheeks, his much tried and much humiliated wife, sitting by the well as usual, had put out the golden hen with its golden chickens — her very last hope ! And as she sat by the well, behold, God Almighty again led the same servant to the well, and when she saw this last great wonder, she no longer tarried to draw water, but rushed back to her mistress saying :

"Lord! mistress! Such things I've seen! That woman has now displayed a golden tray with a golden hen and chickens all of gold! They are so wonderful that you can't keep your eyes off them!"

On hearing this the old witch at once sent for her, thinking in her mind:

"What she's after is not for her..."

And when the stranger came, the witch forthwith secured the golden tray, the golden hen, and its golden chickens, by means of the same crafty trick.

But the emperor, when he came back from hunting that night, and when the milk was brought to him, said to himself:

"I will not drink that milk." No sooner said than done and he threw it somewhere and pretended to be fast asleep.

Having made sure that the emperor was asleep, the witch, still confident in the potency of her drink, again brought the stranger into his room, upon the same terms as on the previous nights, and leaving her there, she went away. Then the ill-starred traveler again fell on her knees by her husband's bed and, choking back her tears, she again said these words:

"Prince Charming, Prince Charming! have pity on two innocent souls who have been laboring these four years under a most dreadful penance! Put your right arm around my waist that the hoop may burst and your son be born, for I can no longer carry this intolerable burden!"

And when she had finished speaking, Prince Charming stretched out his arm as if in a dream and when he touched her waist, bang! went the hoop and she forthwith gave birth to the child, in no way feeling the pains of childbirth. After this, the empress told her husband all she had gone through since he had vanished.

Then and there, in the dead of night, the emperor got up, aroused the whole household and had the old witch brought before him with all the precious things she had craftily secured from his wife. Then he ordered a fiery mare to be brought before him and a bag full of nuts and he commanded that both the bag and the witch be tied to the mare's tail and the mare be let loose. And it was done. And when the mare started running, where a nut fell, there a bit fell off the witch's body, and when the bag dropped off, the witch's head dropped too.

This old witch was none other than the sow with the litter of pigs in the puddle that the old man, Prince Charming's stepfather had come across, as I've told you. She, by means of her devilish tricks, had then turned her master, Prince Charming, into that thin, mangy and sickly pig, that she might afterwards get him to marry one of the eleven daughters she had, the piglets who had run after her along the hillside path. That was why Prince Charming inflicted such a terrible punishment on her. While his trusty servant was laden with great gifts and stayed in their service to the end of his life.

Now please remember, good people, that there had been no wedding-feast at Prince Charming's marriage.

So now they had the wedding-feast and the christening of their child together, the finest that were ever seen and whose like will never be heard of again.

And Prince Charming wished a wish and had his wife's parents as the old man and the old woman who had brought him up, again dressed in imperial purple robes, and he sat them at the head of the table. And crowds and crowds of people thronged to this great and magnificent wedding, and they made merry for three days and three nights and, if they haven't given it up, they are making merry still.

THE TWO STEPSISTERS

Once upon a time there lived an old man and an old woman : the old man had a daughter and the old woman had a daughter. The old woman's daughter was plain, slothful, shrewish, and hardhearted, yet, as she was her mother's darling, she would take it easy, leaving all the hard work for the old man's daughter to do. The old man's daughter was beautiful, industrious, obedient, and kindhearted.

God had endowed her with every good and fine gift. But this good girl was ill-used by both stepsister and stepmother. It was God's luck that she was a hardworking and long-suffering girl, or else it would have been hard for her.

The old man's daughter this, the old man's daughter that ; she was the one to go and fetch kindling for the fire. She was the one to carry the sack on her back to the mill, she, in short, had to be everywhere for all sorts of jobs. All day long she did not rest her legs, no sooner did she get in than off she went again.

On the other hand the old woman and her treasure of a daughter were forever grumbling and ungrateful. In the old woman's mind, the old man's daughter was like a millstone around her neck ; while her own daughter was like the sweet-smelling basil to deck the icons with.

When the two girls went to a spinning party in the evening, the old man's daughter woud not fritter her time away, but spin a basketful of yarn rolls, while the woman's daughter hardly spun out one spindle-full. Then when both girls came home late at night the old woman's daughter would jump quickly over the fence and ask the old man's daughter to give her the basket with the yarn rolls, until she had jumped over. Thereupon the old woman's daughter, cunning thing that she was, would take the basket and run into the house, to the old people, saying *she* had spun those yarn rolls. It was no use for old man's daughter to say afterwards that this was her work, for the old woman and her daughter would brazenly contradict her and it had to be as they would have it. When Sunday or a holiday came around, the old woman's daughter would be gaudily dressed and her hair smoothed

down as if the calves had been licking it. There was no dance, no party in the village that the old woman's daughter would not go to, whereas the old man's daughter was harshly denied anything of the kind. Besides all that, when the old man returned from wherever he had been, the old woman's tongue would babble like a mill wheel, saying that his daughter was undutiful, that she was forever out of the house, that she was slothful, that she was a bad sort, she was this and she was that, and would he turn her out of the house and send her into service somewhere, for there was no keeping her, because she might spoil her stepsister too.

The old man being a boob or whatever you like to call him, would play up to her and whatever she said was gospel to him. His heart might have prompted him to say something, but as it was, the hen had taken to crowing in the house, and the cock had no more say in it: and moreover, suppose his sins prompted him to forget himself, the old woman and her daughter would have been down on him like a ton of bricks!

One day, much embittered with all that the old woman was telling him, the old man called the girl and said to her:

"My child, see what your mother has to say about you: that you won't do her bidding, that you're sassy and vicious, and that there's no keeping you in the house any longer. So take yourself to wherever God leads your footsteps, that there will no longer be such wrangling in the house on your account. But if you take your father's advice, you'll be obedient, gentle, and industrious wherever you go, for in my house you've been getting along somehow, what with fatherly indulgence and all! But among strangers God alone knows what sort of people you'll come across, and they won't put up with all the things that we've put up with."

The poor girl, seeing that the old woman and her daughter were bent upon driving her away at all costs, kissed her father's hand and, with tears in her eyes, set out into the wide world, leaving her father's house behind, with no hope of ever returning!

And she walked a while along a road until, by chance, she met with a small bitch, as ill as anything and so thin that you could have counted her ribs. As soon as she saw the girl, she said:

"Thou lovely and diligent girl, take pity on me and tend me, for I might be useful to thee some time." Then the girl's heart melted; and she took the little bitch and bathed her carefully and tended her full well.

She then left her there and went her way, her heart glad at having done a good deed.

She had not walked very far, when lo and behold! she saw a lovely pear tree in bloom, but all covered with caterpillars. On seeing the girl, the pear tree said:

"Thou lovely and diligent girl, tend me and rid me of the caterpillars, for I might be useful to thee some time."

Diligent as she was, the girl carefully cleaned the pear tree of dead twigs and caterpillars and then went on her way, to find a master to work for. And walking further, behold! she came across an abandoned well all choked up with clay. The well said:

"Thou lovely and diligent girl, tend me, for I might be useful to thee some time."

The girl cleaned the well and tended it thoroughly, then left it and went her way. And as she walked on, behold! she came across an oven all falling apart, almost tumbling down.

As soon as it saw the girl, the oven said:

"Thou lovely and diligent girl, put me together and tend me, for I might be useful to thee some time."

The girl who knew very well that nobody's any the worse for hard work, tucked up her sleeves, kneaded clay and patched up the oven, gave it a clay coating and tended it, so that it did one's heart good to look at it. Then she washed the clay off her hands nicely and again went on her way. And walking now day and night, I don't know how it came about, but she got lost. However she did not lose her trust in God, but walked on, until one fine day in the early morning, as she was crossing a dark forest, she came upon a most lovely glade, and in the glade there stood a cottage overhung by some weeping willows, and as she drew near that house, behold! an old woman gently welcomed her saying:

"Whatever are you doing in these parts, my child, and who may you be?"

"Who I am, good mother? I am a poor girl, motherless and fatherless, I might say; and God on high alone knows what I've been through since the mother who bore me crossed her hands upon her breast![1]

I'm looking for someone to work for, and knowing no one and wandering from place to place, I've lost my way. Yet God must have guided me to your house, and I beg you to give me shelter!"

"Poor girl!" the old woman said. "God alone forsooth, will have led your steps here and delivered you from perils. I am Holy Sunday. Serve me today and be assured that you won't leave my house empty-handed tomorrow."

"I will, mother, but I don't know what jobs I am to do."

"You're to bathe the youngsters, who're now sleeping, and feed them, then you're to cook a meal for me, and when I get back from church, let me find it neither hot nor cold, but done well and ready to eat."

When she had finished speaking, the old woman set out for church while the girl rolled up her sleeves and set to work. She first got the bath water ready, then went outside and began calling:

"Children, children, children dear! Come, let mother give you a wash!"

And when she looked out, what did she see? The yard was filled and the forest was teeming with a crowd of dragons and all sorts of beasts, great and small. Yet, strong in faith, her trust in God, the girl did not hesitate, but took them one by one and washed and tended them, as well as could be. She then set to cooking and when Holy Sunday came home from church and saw the children nicely washed and every job well done, she was filled with joy. And when she had had her meal, she told the girl to go up into the attic and there choose a casket, whichever pleased her best and take it as wages, but she was not to open it before she had reached her father's house. The girl went up into the attic and there saw a lot of caskets, some old and ugly, others new and better looking. Yet, she, not being greedy, chose the oldest and ugliest of all. And when she came down with it, Holy Sunday knitted her brows a little, but as there was no way out of it, she gave the girl her blessing. The girl

[1] Departed from this life.

took her casket upon her back and joyfully made for her father's house along the very road that she had come by. On the road, behold! the oven she had tended was full of fine, well-baked pastries. She ate some of those pastries and she ate very well. Then she took some to eat on the way, and set out. Further on, behold, on the well stood two silver goblets out of which she drank her fill of water. She then took the goblets with her and walked on. And further on her way, behold, the pear tree she had tended was laden with pears, yellow as wax, so ripe they were, and sweet as honey. On seeing the girl, the pear tree bent its boughs and she ate her fill and took what she needed for her journey. Then, walking on, behold, she met the little bitch which was now strong and good looking and wore a necklace of ducats around her neck. This she gave the girl as a token of her gratitude for having been tended by her in her sickness. And from there the girl never stopped walking until she reached her father's house. When the old man saw her, his eyes filled with tears and his heart with gladness. The girl then took out the necklace and the silver goblets and gave them to her father; then on their opening the casket together innumerable horses and herds of cattle and flocks of sheep came out of it, so that on the spot the old man became young again at the sight of so much wealth, while the old woman stood like one scalded and didn't know where to turn for spite. Her daughter then took her courage in both hands and said:

"Never you mind, mother, the world's not drained of its riches; I'll go and fetch you lots more!" Saying this she forthwith set out, storming and raging. On she went, walking along the same road that the old man's daughter had walked. She, too, met the thin sick bitch; she, too, came across the pear tree covered with caterpillars, the dirty, dry and forsaken well, the neglected, tumble-down oven, but when bitch and pear tree and well and oven asked her to tend them she answered angrily and jeeringly:

"It's quite certain you would like me to, but I'm not about to dirty the tiny hands that are my father's and mother's pride and joy. How many servants like me have you had?"

And all of them, knowing that you'd get milk from a barren cow rather than help from a pampered and lazy girl,

let her go her way in peace, and asked no help from her any more. And thus walking on she too reached Holy Sunday's abode; yet there, too, she behaved like the crumbling, bold-faced and foolish girl that she was. Instead of cooking tasty dishes well done, and instead of bathing Holy Sunday's children as carefully as the old man's daughter had bathed them, she scalded them all, so that they ran around shrieking like mad, all sore and smarting. She turned out the food smoked and burned and left it to get ice-cold on the table so that no one could touch it.

And when Holy Sunday came back from church, she raised her hands in horror at what she found. Yet Holy Sunday, gentle and forgiving as she was, would not demean herself by wrangling with such a spoiled lazy creature as that girl was, but asked her to go up into the attic and choose a casket, whichever she liked, and go her own way. The girl then went up and chose the newest and finest casket, for she liked taking as much as she possibly could get and what was best and finest too, but she hated doing a good job of work.

Then having come down with the casket, she did not go and take leave of Holy Sunday and ask for a blessing, but off she went, as if from an empty house, without so much a look back; and she walked as fast as her legs would carry her, lest Holy Sunday should change her mind, set out after her, overtake her and take the casket from her. And, when she came to the oven, there were delicious pastries in it! But as she went up to them to eat her fill, the fire burned her and she couldn't take any. It was the same at the well; the silver goblets were there, true enough, and the well was brimful of water, but just as the girl was about to take a goblet and have a drink of water, the goblets immediately vanished into the depths, the water in the well dried up instantly, and she was parched with thirst. Then she came to the pear tree, it was almost weighed down under its abundant crop of pears, but do you think it was her let to taste any? No, for the pear tree shot up a thousand times taller, so that its branches touched the clouds, so that she'd nothing to swallow but her appetite.

Further on she met the little bitch too: a necklace of ducats still hung around her neck, but as the girl tried to take it, the little bitch bit her fingers and would not let her

lay a hand on her. For spite and shame the girl now gnawed the tiny hands that were her father and mother's pride and joy, but there was no help for it. At last, with great difficulty, she reached her mother's house, yet there again they had no joy of any wealth, for when the casket was opened, a host of dragons came out of it and they instantly swallowed up the old woman and her daughter, as if they had never been of this world, and the dragons, casket and all vanished utterly away.

As to the old man, he was now rid of his wife and had countless riches. He married his daughter off to a good and hardworking fellow.

The cocks now crowed on the gate-posts, on the threshold and everywhere, but no hens crowed like cocks of ill-omen anymore in the old man's house, for they would speedily have met their end. The only trouble was that the old man was left bald-headed and hunch-backed, for the old woman had often smoothed his hair and stroked his back with the poker, to see if the hominy was done!

IVAN AND HIS BAG

Now the story goes that once upon a time there was a Russian whose name was Ivan. This Russian had been in the army since boyhood, and having served his term several times over, he was now an old man. His superiors, seeing he had fulfilled his duty as a soldier, released him with his weapons and all from the army, to go wherever he wished, and, moreover, they gave him two rubles, for his expenses.

So Ivan thanked his officers and went and bade farewell to his comrades of the army with whom he had a dram or two of spirits, and he set out upon his way, singing lustily.

And as he tottered unsteadily along, now on one side of the road, now on the other, not knowing where he was going, God and St. Peter chanced to be walking a little way in front of him on a path at the side of the road, talking — they alone knew what about. Hearing someone singing behind them, St. Peter looked back and behold, he saw a fellow staggering this way and that, along the road.

"Lord," St. Peter said, quite scared, "either let's hurry up or go to one side, lest this soldier be quarrelsome and we get into trouble with him. You remember I once got a good hiding from such a one."

"Don't worry, Peter," said God. "Don't be afraid of a traveler who sings. This soldier is kindhearted and charitable. He has got two rubles in the world, and by way of testing him you pretend to beg at this end of the bridge and I at the other. You just see how he'll give us both rubles as alms, poor man! Mind me, Peter, I've said to you many a time, that the Kingdom of Heaven is for such as these."

So St. Peter sat down at one end of the bridge and God at the other and they started begging.

On reaching the bridge, Ivan pulled the two rubles from where he had tucked them away and gave one to St. Peter and one to God, saying:

"Easy come, easy go. Here, take these! They were God's gift to me, this is my gift to you and God will grant me more, for he's got plenty." And he started singing again and went on his way.

Then, greatly amazed, St. Peter said :

"Lord, here's a good soul indeed, and he shouldn't be allowed out of your sight unrewarded."

"All right, Peter, I'll remember him, don't you worry." So God set out with St. Peter and little by little, they caught up with Ivan who was singing his head off as if all the world belonged to him.

"Good day to you, Ivan," said God, "you sing well, don't you, and no mistake about it."

"I thank you," Ivan said with a start. "Yet how come you to be sure that my name is Ivan ?"

"Well, and if I don't know, who else should ?" God answered.

"And who might you be," Ivan said rather huffily, "that you should boast of knowing everything ?"

"I am the beggar you gave alms to over there by the bridge, Ivan. And he who gives alms to the poor lends to God himself, the scriptures say. Here, take your loan back for we have no need of money. I just wanted to show Peter how charitable you were. And know, Ivan, that I am God Almighty and that it lies in my power to give you whatever you ask for ; because you're a just and generous soul."

At these words Ivan felt a thrill go through him and he promptly sobered up and, falling on his knees before God, he said :

"Lord, if you are the one true God, as you say you are, I ask you to bless this my knapsack so that I may pack away anyone I wish into it, and they not be able to get out without my consent."

Smiling, God blessed the knapsack as Ivan wished and then said :

"When you have enough of roaming this world, then come and keep watch at my gate for a while and it will not be ill for you."

"I will most gladly, Lord ; I'll come right away," Ivan said. "But for the present I'll go and see if I can't spot something to put in my bag." So saying, he made straight off across the fields for a large mansion that was hardly visible in front of him on the brow of a hill. And he walked, and walked until, at dusk, he reached the mansion. And as he got there, he walked into the yard, presented himself before the boyar and asked to be put up for the night. This particular boyar was to be somewhat close-fisted, but seeing

that Ivan was the Tsar's man, he had no choice. So, willy-nilly, he ordered a servant to give him something to eat and a bed in a spare room where he always put up guests who came unexpectedly. The servant did his master's bidding, took Ivan, gave him something to eat and led him to the appointed place, to lie down.

"We'll see if he doesn't get more rest than he bargained for," the boyar said to himself, having ordered all that was needed. "I know that he'll be busy this night. Now we'll see who will come out on top, the devil or he?"

For I must tell you that this boyar had a couple of rooms a little apart from the rest, which were supposed to be haunted by the Evil One. And that's just where he had given orders that Ivan was to be lodged."

But Ivan had no inkling of this. As soon as he entered the room where the boyar's man had taken him, he laid out his weapons, crossed himself as it was his custom to do and then sprawled fully dressed as he was upon a couch as soft as cotton wool; he put the knapsack with the two rubles under his head and fell asleep, for he could hardly stand on account of weariness.

But could he rest, poor fellow? No sooner had he snuffed out his candle, than he woke up to feel someone snatching the pillow under his head and tossing it away! At which Ivan seized his sword, jumped up quickly, lit the candle, and began to search the room, but he found no one.

"Now isn't that wonderful? Either there's something mighty queer about this room or the earth had quaked and my pillow had gone from under my head, and here I am, stumbling about like a lunatic. Whatever can these earthquakes be?" Ivan said, making a few more signs of the cross in the direction of the ground and lying down again.

But just as he was falling asleep, a [illegible] of voices was suddenly heard about the room, each one more hateful than the other: some meowing like cats; others squealing like pigs, some croaking like frogs, others growling like bears. In short, all sorts of pretended voices were heard, so that you couldn't tell what in the devil's name might be going on. Then it began to down on Ivan what might be the matter.

"You wait and see! For there's more to this than meets the eye, as far as I can judge." And suddenly he started shouting in a loud voice:

"*Pashol na turbinka, chiorti* [1] !"

Straight away the devils started streaming one after the other into the bag as if the wind was sucking them in. And when they were all in, Ivan started beating them like a cabby beating his horses.

Then he tied the mouth of the bag tight and placed it under his head, occasionally giving it some Russian nudges, as he best knew how, so that he knocked the heart and soul out of the devils. Then he laid his head upon them and, no longer worried by anyone, he slept the sleep of the just.

But about cockcrow, Scaraoschi, the chief of the devils, seeing that some of his servants were late, hurried to the usual place to look for them. And getting there in a flash he crept, in a way known only to himself, into Ivan's room and slapped his face as hard as he could, while he lay there sleeping. Ivan then jumped up and shouted :

"*Pashol na turbinka !*"

Scaraoschi then got in without more ado and squeezed in with the others, since he had no option.

"You wait, and I'll set you to rights, you unclean spirits : I'll make you laugh on the other side of your faces, that I will," said Ivan, much upset. "You meant to play the deuce with me, did you ? I'll give you such a thrashing as will make you a laughing stock to the very dogs."

And he dressed hurriedly, picked up all his belongings and walked out into the yard, kicking up such a hullabaloo that the whole household rose at the din he made.

"And what's the matter with you, you oaf, that you should get up so early and kick up such a row ?" said the boyar's men, bumping into one another as if they were suffering from night blindness.

"Nothing's the matter at all," Ivan said pertly. "I've just caught some hares and I've a mind to skin them, that's all."

With all this racket the boyar also woke up and asked : "What's the hubbub down there in the yard ?"

"Just that we've had no rest all night long because of that Russian fellow. The devil knows what's ailing him. He says he caught some hares and wants to skin them, begging your pardon."

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[1] Russain for "Quick march into the knapsack, you devils !".

At this, Ivan himself stood before the boyar, his bag full of demons who were wriggling like fish in a net.

"Here you are, master; these are the fellows I've been battling with all night, but at least I've rid your house of devils and here they are, an early morning gift to you. Order some rods to be brought, for I'll have them soundly thrashed as if they were running gauntlet, so they'll remember, as long as they live, that they've met Ivan, God's own man."

On seeing this, the boyar was both frightened and beside himself with joy; he had paid for many prayers to be said by priests from all around, to rid his house of devils, but all in vain! Yet it seemed that their hour had now come, and that Ivan was the right priest for them!

"Right so, Ivan," the boyar said happily. "They'll bring you rods, as many as you like, and you do your duty, as best you can; and I'll reward you handsomely, be sure!"

Finally, after a short while, Ivan got a cartful of rods that suited him down to the ground. He took them and tied them together in two and threes in a cunning fashion he was fully acquainted with.

By this time the whole village had crowded around Ivan to see the passion of the devils. For a thing of wonder this was, without a doubt! Then Ivan untied the knapsack in the sight of all of them, just enough to slip his hand in, and pulling out each little devil by the horns, he thrashed it with the rod until its skin burst. And having settled scores with it, he let it go on the understanding that it would never come there again.

"I won't come, Ivan, as long as I live," the demon would say, smarting all over; and he'd shoot off as fast as his legs would carry him, and the on-lookers, the boys especially, were laughing their heads off.

And at long last Ivan pulled out Scaraoschi, dragging him by his beard, and gave him such a true muscovite hiding that he very nearly gave up his ghost.

"There now! You've been looking for trouble and trouble you've got, Master Scaraoschi! Let that teach you not to plague people another time, you dirty devil you!" When he let him go, behold, Scaraoschi ran after the others, as fast as he could!

"God grant you a long life," the boyar said, hugging and kissing Ivan, "you stay with me from now on, Ivan, and as you've rid my house of devils, I'll see that you live in clover."

"Not so, master," said Ivan. "I must go and serve God, who's king over us all." So saying, he girded on his sword, flung his knapsack over his back, and shouldered his gun out on his way to God. While the on-lookers, caps in hand, wished him a prosperous journey wherever it took him.

"Goodbye and don't worry about coming back," the boyar said: "had you stayed you'd have been a brother to me, as it is, you'll be as good as two."

I rather think that the boyar, aristocrat though he was, was rather scared of the bag, so that he was not as sorry as he seemed to lose Ivan who had done him so much good.

Yet Ivan did not waste any time thinking of this; he was now seeking his way, asking everyone where God lived. But they all shrugged their shoulders, not knowing the answer to such a strange question.

"St. Nicholas is the only person who would know this," Ivan said, pulling a small icon from under his clothes and kissing it on both sides. And then, quite miraculously, he found himself at Heaven's gate! And without more ado, he began to pound on the gate, as hard as he could. Then St. Peter asked from within:

"Who's there?"

"Me."

"Who's me?"

"Me, Ivan."

"And what is it you want?"

"Have you any tobacco?"

"No."

"Have you any vodka?"

"No."

"Are there any women?"

"No."

"Are there any fiddlers?"

"There are none, Ivan, why are you pestering me with all these questions?"

"And where can such things be found?"

"In hell, Ivan, not here."

"My, but what shortages there are here in Heaven," Ivan said and straight away he started on his way to hell.

And he alone knew by what devious means he went, but before very long, behold, he came upon the gate of hell. He started knocking on the gate and shouting:

"Hey! Any tobacco?"

"Plenty !" someone answered from within.

"Any vodka ?"

"Of course."

"Any women ?"

"Why ever shouldn't there be ?"

"Any fiddlers ?"

"Ha, ha, as many as you like !"

"Ha, *harasho ! harasho !* [1] That's the place for me ! Open up quickly," Ivan said stamping his feet and rubbing his hands.

The devil at the gate, thinking it was some old customer, opened up; and lo ! they suddenly found themselves face to face with Ivan and his bag.

"Alack and alas !" the devils then said, scratching their heads in confusion. "Now we're for it !" But Ivan thundered for vodka, tobacco, fiddlers, and beautiful lasses, for he had a mind to go on a binge.

The devils glanced at one another and seeing there was no way of opposing Ivan, they started bustling about, fetching vodka, tobacco, fiddlers, and anything that Ivan set his heart on. The devils ran in all directions, spinning around like tops and trying to please Ivan's every wish, for they were mighty afraid of his bag, more so than of the Holy Cross.

After a time Ivan got tipsy and started hollering across hell and dancing the *Lezginka* and the *Ecossaise* [2], taking devils and she-devils by surprise and carrying them along with him; and in that reel he overturned tables and all sorts of things on all sides, and his pranks were enough to make you feel your sides splitting with laughter.

Now what were the devils to do to get him out ? In vain did they think, ponder and cudgel their brains, they couldn't even begin to imagine what to do ! But the devil's mother, having a steadier head than all the devils, said to Scaraoschi :

"Your heads are no use to you at all, and if it weren't for me you'd be even worse off than you are now. Make haste and bring me a barrel, a dog's skin, and two sticks, and I'll make a toy that'll soon sweep him out of here." Without delay she was given the things she'd asked for and the devil's mother quickly made a drum. Then slipping away

[1] Russian for "fine, fine !".

[2] Festive Ukrainian dances.

from Ivan, she went outside with it and started beating it, like a call to arms : brr... brr...

Ivan then came to his senses and dashed out in a twinkle, his gun slung upon his shoulder, to see what was up.

The devil's mother then darted back in, the devils slammed the gate behind Ivan, and pushing the bolts home they rejoiced at having got rid of the knapsack.

Ivan knocked at the gate as hard as he could, and threatened them with his gun, but the devils had now learned their lesson.

"So that's it, hornies ? If you ever fall into my hands again, my bag will take care of you."

But the devils would make no answer from within.

Seeing that the gates of hell were shut fast and that the devils had no mind to open them, he now grew sick of fiddles, tobacco, and vodka, and again set out for Heaven to serve the Lord.

And as soon as he came outside the gates of Heaven, he sat himself on sentry duty and kept watch both day and night, never sleeping, never moving.

Shortly after this, behold, Death came along and wanted to go up to God to get her orders. Ivan at once pointed his bayonet at her chest, saying :

"*Stoti, vidma,*[1] where do you think you're going ?"

"To see the Almighty, Ivan, and get new orders."

"Not allowed," Ivan said. "I'll go and bring you back the answer."

"No, no, Ivan, I must go myself."

Then Ivan, seeing that Death was pushing past him, roared at her :

"*Pashol, Vidma, na turbinka.*"

Having no choice, Death at once got into the bag, groaning and sighing enough to make you weep with pity. While Ivan casually tied the mouth of the bag and hung it up on a tree. Then he started pounding at the gate. St. Peter opened it and stood face to face with Ivan.

"Well, Ivan, so you've had enough of frolicking about the world on the loose, have you ?"

"I've had enough, more than enough, St. Peter !"

"Well, what's the trouble now ?"

"I just want to go and have a word with the Almighty."

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[1] Russian for "What is it, witch ?".

"Right you are, old man, go on, nobody's stopping you. It looks as though you're one of us now."

Ivan then went straight to God and said:

"Whether you know it or not, I've been standing sentry at heaven's gate for some time, and now Death has come and wants to know what your orders are."

"Tell her, Ivan, on my behalf, my whishes are that for the next three years only old people should die, such as yourself," God said with a kindly smile.

"Done, Lord," said Ivan, giving God a long look. "I'll go tell her what your orders are."

He went and released Death from her imprisonment and said to her:

"God's orders are that for the next three years you should feed on old timber; young timber you must not touch! Got that? Now off with you and do your duty!"

Death then set out through the woods, as angry as could be, and started gnawing at old timber till her very jaws were cracking.

And when three years had gone by, she again made her way to God to get fresh orders. But when she thought of meeting Ivan, her legs gave way under her and cold shivers of terror ran down her spine.

"The bag! It's that cursed bag that sickens me," Death groaned. "However there's nothing I can do, I've got to go," she said sighing.

And so, after a little delay, she found herself at the gates of Heaven. When she got there she came upon Ivan again.

"Still here, Ivan, are you?"

"Indeed I am," Ivan said, turning around and blocking her way. "And where did you think I'd be, since this is my job?"

"I thought you might have gone out into the wide world to sow some more wild oats."

"Oh, but it's the world I'm shunning: I know how sweet and how bitter it can be, the devil take it. I've got as bored as can be with it. But why have you lost so much flesh, you witch?"

"Through your good offices, Ivan, I hope you won't stand in my way this time, but will let me go up to God for I've weighty business at hand, that I have."

"Yes, I'll bet you have, but just you put what *you* want out of your mind, the world won't be the loser by it. You'd like a chat with the Almighty, wouldn't you ?"

"Don't you think you're carrying a joke too far, Ivan ?"

"So that's how it is, you want to call me to account, do you ? *Pashol na turbinka, Vidma !"*

Death then crept into the bag and Ivan gave her a sound thrashing and said :

"Play your little game with anyone you please, but you won't play it with Ivan."

God, of course, knew all about these goings-on, but wished to let Ivan have his own way for a while, for Death had had hers long enough and much good had she done in her lifetime !

"Just open up, will you, St. Peter," Ivan said, knocking on the gate.

St. Peter opened it and Ivan went and stood before God again, saying :

"Lord, Death is asking what your orders are now. And please, don't take offense, but truth to say, she's mighty fidgety and trying, she is ; she's on tenterhooks and would have your answer right away."

"Take my answer to her, Ivan ! for three years I wish that young people alone should die, and for another three years, just naughty children."

"So be it, Lord." Ivan said, bowing down to the ground, I'll go and tell her your commands." And once outside the gates, he pulled Death out of the bag and said to her :

"God's wish is that from now on, three years on end, you shall feed on young timber ; and another three years on shoots of osiers, twigs, saplings and such, but old timber you must not touch or it'll be the worse for you ! Do you understand, you witch ? Go on, be off with you, and carry out the orders to the letter."

And Death, swallowing her wrath, set out through thickets, meadows, and groves, as angry as could be. And willy-nilly she started gnawing at saplings and shrubs, munching shoots and twigs until her teeth grated and her loins and neck ached with so much stretching and reaching up at the tall poplars, and so much stooping and creeping into the undergrowth in quest of tender shoots. She stilled her hunger, poor thing, as best she could. In short she thus

tortured herself for three years and yet three more and when the six year ordeal was over, she again made for Heaven to see what orders she would now get. She knew very well, did the witch, what was in store for her, but what was she to do?

"The bag, curse it," Death was saying, walking to Heaven as if she were going to the gallows. And as for God, I really don't know what to say, that I may not trespass against him. It looks as though he's fallen into his second childhood. God help us, giving that crazy Ivan so much authority over me. I'd be right glad to see God for all his size and strength getting into Ivan's bag one of these days, or St. Peter at least, then they would sympathize with me, they would indeed!"

She thus walked on, mumbling senselessly, and reached the gate of Heaven. Then she said, with a sigh:

"Ivan, are you going to torment me again with that bag of yours?"

"If I could, I'd pluck your eyes out like the very devil's and I'd roast you on a spit," Ivan answered spitefully, "for you've been the undoing of so many people from Adam's days to the present. *Poshol na turbinku, Vidma!* And from now on I won't even tell God you're here, you old witch! You and the devil's mother are a nice pair. I'd gladly sink my teeth into both of you good creatures and tear you to pieces. I'd beat you to a jelly good and proper, and your bones will now jolly well rot in the bag, ha, ha!"

Death groaned, but there was no way out. Ivan neither saw or heard her. Well, time passed, I couldn't say how long, and one day God came to the gate to see what Ivan was up to, with that bag of his.

"Well, Ivan, how are things going? I suppose Death hasn't come this way, has she?"

Ivan then hung his head, kept silent, and blushed, while Death, half-smothered, answered, from the bag:

"Here I am, Lord, I'm shut up and I can't get out. You've made me the laughing stock of this fool, unfortunate creature that I am."

God then opened the bag, let Death out and said to Ivan:

"Well, Ivan, that's enough now. You've had your time and had your way; charitable you are, kind-hearted you've

been, there's no doubt about it. But lately, since I've blessed that knapsack of yours, you've turned somewhat... how shall I put it? You wrought havoc among the devils at that boyar's. In hell you kicked up such a row that your name spread like wild fire. As to Death, I've allowed you to have your way with her, after your own heart, you can't deny it. But there's an end to all things, my son. It's now your turn to die, I can't help it. We must give every one their due for Death has her place too, she's not just useless as you think."

So Ivan seeing that the time for joking had passed, knelt down before God and asked with tears in his eyes:

"Lord! please let me have three more days, time to cleanse my soul, make my coffin with my own weak hands and get into it of my own free will; and after that, let Death do what she will with me, for I can well perceive that I've come to the end of my tether. I'm shrinking away before your very eyes."

God granted this prayer of his and taking the bag from him, left him in the witch's care, to take his soul in three days' time.

Being now left alone and so angry as could be, partly because God had taken his bag, partly because he was going to die, Ivan began thinking.

"Now let's sit and consider what it has profited me living in this world," Ivan said to himself. "In the army I knew nothing but worries; what I had one day vanished the next! Since then I've been roaming about like a rogue and a vagabond. I went from Heaven to Hell and from Hell to Heaven again. And right now, at this moment when all is at stake, I hear no kind word from anyone. It's Heaven I was after, is it? at my time of life too! That's come from quarrelling with the devil: in this miserable hole of a heaven, it's all 'great boast, little roast', empty show and nothing behind it. As the saying goes: you've got the bagful of money and yet you pine for everything. What greater trial is there than that? There's no vodka, no tobacco, no fiddlers, no feasting, no nothing! Just three more days I've got to live and then off you go, Ivan, off the face of the earth. Now is there no other trick to play, while there's still time?"

And so he sat on for a while, his brow propped on his hand, and suddenly something dawned on him:

"Wait, I've got it! After all, come what may; but it won't be in vain... I can well see that it's all one to me now."

Straight away he went to a place he knew of with his two rubles and bought himself carpenter's tools, two thick boards, four hinges, some nails, two rings of iron and a great big padlock. He then set to make himself such a fine coffin, that even an emperor might have lain in it.

"There you are, Ivan, your house for all time," he said. "Three ells of earth, that's all you'll get! See what this world's blustering boils down to!"

And no sooner had he spoken the last word, than Death was already behind him:

"Well, Ivan, are you ready?"

"Ready," he answered with a smile.

"If so, come on! Hurry up and lie down in the coffin, for I have no time to lose. Perhaps others are waiting for me to give them the passwords."

Ivan then stretched himself face downwards in the coffin.

"Not that way, Ivan," said Death.

"But how?"

"Lie down as the dead should lie."

Ivan rolled upon his side, with his legs dangling over the edge.

"Well now, Ivan, a joke's a joke, but this is no time for joking. How long are you going to keep me waiting? Lie down straight, brother, as they all do."

Ivan then turned face downwards again, his head dangling sideways and his feet sticking out again.

"Woe is me, woe is me! Don't you Ivan know that much? It's clear you've only been good for knavish tricks in this world. Get up and I'll show you, you fool!"

Ivan then got out of the coffin and stood quite shamefacedly. While Death, anxious to teach him, lay down upon her back with her legs stretched out, her hands crossed on her breast, and her eyes closed, saying:

"There, Ivan, that's how you've got to lie down." Ivan then wasted no time, but slammed the lid, locked the padlock, and paying no heed to Death's entreaties, hoisted the coffin on his shoulders and went and heaved it into a great swift-flowing river.

"There now, I've finished with you, off. The devil take you! And come out of your coffin when my grandmother gets you out of the grave. God took my bag away. He did, and all because of you, but I've done you in, at last."

"Well, Lord," Saint Peter said laughing; "see what your Holiness's Ivan is up to now? For well has it been said: give Ivan an inch and he'll take an ell."

Seeing that there was no limit to what he would do, God began to be rather concerned about his tricks! And so he had the coffin opened wherever it was, that Death might come out on dry land and be revenged upon Ivan in her turn.

And so it was done immediately; and while Ivan had no inkling that he would ever set eyes on Death again, behold! he found himself face to face with her once more. She said:

"Well, now, Ivan, was that a fair deal?" Ivan stood as if stunned and couldn't say a single word.

"You still don't seem to understand, do you? Well, well, Ivan, it's God's boundless patience and kindness alone that'll overcome your lawlessness and wilfulness. You would have been cleaned out of this world long ago and a laughing stock for the devils, had not God complied with your wishes, more than with His own son's. Know Ivan that from now on you will be eager to die, and you'll crawl on all fours asking me to take your soul, but I shall pretend I've forgotten you and let you live as long as Methusaleh, so that you may see how unbearable life is, when you're so far advanced in years!" And she left him unclaimed, to go on living.

As long as time and earth shall last,
Thou shalt endure the torrid blast.

When Ivan saw that he should never die, he said to himself:

"Wouldn't the old witch like me to bash out my brains! But by Heaven, I won't think of it. Let her do it if she will."

Ivan from then on, or so the story goes, set about smoking and drinking *tuica*[1] and other spirits! They disappeared into him as if they were consumed by fire.

"Feasting and swilling, feasting and swilling, Ivan, get on with it, or else you'll go out of your mind with boredom," he would say.

And what was he to do, poor fellow, since Death was blind and wouldn't see him? So Ivan the Deathless lived for ages on end, and if he's not dead yet, he may be living still.

---

[1] Romanian plum brandy.

PART II

SELECTED POEMS OF MIHAI EMINESCU

VENUS AND MADONNA

(Venere și Madonă, 1870)

An ideal hidden in the night of an age that now
no longer is,
An age when men in legend thought, and spoke their
thoughts in poets' wise,
Oh, but I see you, hear you, know you, sweet
and youthful promises
Born of a world with other stars, with other gods
and other skies.

Venus, warmly gleaming marble, with eyes of stone that
brightly shine,
With arms as smooth and gentle as the dream of some
high poet king,
A goddess and a woman fair that in one body
do combine,
A woman of whose beauty still e'en to the present
day we sing.

Rafael, astray in dreams, as though in night's
star-sparkling air,
His spirit drunken with their rays and spring's eternal
wonder seen,
Espied your face, and dreaming heaven with fragrant
moonlit gardens fair
Did set you in the stars to reign, of all God's angels you
the queen.

Upon an empty canvas he the sweet Madonna then
did paint
With gleaming diadem of stars, a virgin smile lit
in her eyes,
A pallid ray upon her cheek; a woman yet an angel
saint
For in our visions do we see angels all in woman's
guise.

And thus I, who in the night of a life of poetry lonely
dwell,
Essied you, o barren woman, without soul and without
fire
And of you have made an angel, sweet as secret magic
spell,
When across a desert world luck and longing
do conspire.

I saw your face corruption show, by lust's hot hunger
drawn and pale,
I saw your lips depraved and bruised by passion's
blinding violence,
And over your white shoulders bare I threw the poet's
misty veil
And on your pallid cheeks I set a girlish glow
of innocence.

I gave to you the radiance that lights with sparkling
fairy
The sacred mien of praying nun, of pious child
celestial;
Out of a demon made a saint, out of discord harmony,
And lit within your heart impure a virgin brilliance
matinal.

Disillusion all is gone, the veil of dream is sadly torn,
Your frosty bloodless lips have touched to wakefulness
my sleeping brow
And I have learned to gaze on you with endless pity
and with scorn,
My love for you, o demon child, grown cold and quite
extinguished now.

I see you now a bacchant who a plaited myrtle wreath
does wear
That you did from the pious head of some good martyr
sinfully steal;
A martyr whose sweet virgin soul was saintly as fervent
prayer,
While your delirious heart instead through endless
bacchanal does reel.

As Rafael on canvas bare did the Madonna's portait
paint
With gleaming diadem of stars and eyes lit with a virgin
smile,
So I a pallid mortal girl transformed into a deathless
saint,
A girl with barren empty soul and body soiled, depraved
and vile.

. . . . . .

You weep dear child? But don't you know that in your
will the power lies
With but a single pleading glance my yearning heart
again to bind?
I kneel down humbly at your feet and seek for pardon
in your eyes,
I kiss your hands again, again and beg that I forgiveness
find.

No, dry your eyes, dear one, don't weep, my accusations
do not heed
For they were naught but empty lies, unfounded, wicked
and unfair.
Why, were you demon, so much love would make you
holy then indeed,
And I adore this demon saint with big blue eyes
and golden hair.

Translated by *Corneliu Popescu*

MORTUA EST !

(Mortua est ! 1871)

Two candles, tall sentry, beside an earth mound,
A dream with wings broken that trail to the ground.
Loud flung from the belfry calamitous chime...
'Tis thus that you passed o'er the bound'ries of time.

Gone by are the hours when the heavens entire
Flowed rivers of milk and grew flowers of fire,
When the thunderous clouds were but castles erect
Which the moon like a queen each in turn did inspect.

I see you a shadow bright silver transcending,
With wings high uplifted to heaven ascending,
I see you slow climbing through the sky's scaffold bars
Midst a tempest of light and a snowstorm of stars ;

While the witches the sound of their spinning prolong,
Exalted in sunshine, swept up by a song,
O'er your breast like a saint your white arms crossed
in prayer,
And gold on the water, and silver in the air.

I see your soul's parting, its flight I behold ;
Then gaze at the clay that remains... mute and cold,
At the winding-sheet clung to the coffin's rude sill,
At your smile sweet and candid, that seems alive still.

Translated by *Corneliu Popescu*

EVE ON THE HILL

(Sara pe deal, 1872)

Dreary the horn sounds in the eve on the hill,
Sheepflocks return, stars on their way twinkle still,
Watersprings weep murmuring clear, and I see
Under a tree, love, thou art waiting for me.

Holy and pure passes the moon on the sky,
Moist seem the stars born from the vault clear and high,
Longing thine eyes look from afar to divine,
Heaving thy breast, pensive thy head doth recline.

Tired with their toil, peasants come back from the field,
From the old church, laborer's comfort and shield,
Voices of bells thrill the whole sky high above;
Struck is my heart, trembling and burning with love.

Ah! very soon quietness steals over all,
Ah! very soon hasten shall I to thy call,
Under the tree, there I shall sit the whole night,
Telling thee, love, thou art my only delight.

Cheek press'd to cheek, there in sweet ecstasy we,
Falling asleep under the old locust-tree,
Smiling in dream, seem in a heaven to live,
For such a night who his whole life would not give?

Translated by *Petre Grimm*

EMPEROR AND PROLETARIAN

(Împărat și proletar, 1874)

On dreary wooden benches, in low-coiled tavern squalid,
Where day but palely falters, through smoke-bemarked glass,
Beside long cheerless tables, with sullen looks and pallid,
A group of outcast wanderers forlornly there hath tarried:
The poor and sceptic children of proletarian class.

Dost say man shines effulgent, quoth one with cynic sneer,
In this dark world of hardship, of bitterness and pain?
No spark in him appeareth of candid light and clear.
His ray is dull and clouded, like this be-mudded sconce,
Whereon he ruleth sovereign, unchallenged in his reign.

What's justice? See the mighty, behind their fortunes'
shielding,
Erect their laws and edicts, to serve them as a foil,
Against ye ever plotting, with wealth stolen from your
yielding,
Whom they to labor sentence, by boundless powers they're
wielding,
And hold in subjugation your lives of ceaseless toil.

With sated langor gorge they the sweets their lives o'er-cumber,
Bright hours upon them smiling, their day in dalliance flies;
In winter, 'mid green gardens, they quaff the vine's rich
amber,
In heat of summer sweltering 'mid Alpine peaks they clamber,
And night to morn transforming, they close day's sleepy eyes.

For them what folk call virtue exists not; yet vicarious,
To ye, they falsely preach it: your doughty brawn and sweat
Their lumbering States are needing, for their expansion
glorious;
Their fiery wars need fighting, that they may rise victorious;
That by your bloody slaughter your rulers may be great.

Their navies flaunting proudly, and armies high-belauded,
The crowns, by reigning monarchs, on haughty foreheads
borne,
Those millions piled on millions, in lavish heaps, safe-hoarded,
Rich vampires are amassing, depress the poor, defrauded,
And from o'er-burdened toiling of weary mobs are drawn.

Religion — 'tis but phrasing, created for your deceiving,
That by its lure enthralling, your yokèd necks ye'll bow;
For hold the heart no vision of recompense relieving,
After your bit'r labors and life of constant grieving,
Would ye the curse still carry, like oxen at the plough?

With shadows vague and formless your sight they have
extinguished;
By faith in last requital, mendaciously have led;
Ah, no; when life lies dying, all joy must be relinquished;
To whom this world naught gifted, save sorrow, sore and
anguished
Gains no redress post-mortal; for they who die are dead.

Vain lies, empty phrases alone the States sustaining;
Pretence that destined order they cunningly portray;
To make ye strong defenders, their wealth and power
maintaining,
In armed ranks conscribing, by discipline constraining;
To fight your very brothers, they drive ye to the fray.

Unto malignant millions why are ye subjugated;
Ye that a mere subsistence scarce wring from ceaseless toil?
To early death and wastage why are ye dedicated,
Whilst they in easeful comfort have aye luxuriated;
Scarce time amid their feasting to cast the mortal coil?

Bethink thee; power and numbers are yours for liberation!
It needs but that ye will it, to part the soil by might.
Build no more walls and ramparts to serve wealth's
preservation;
Or make for ye a prison, when, thrust by desperation,
Ye fancy to life's bounty, ye also have the right.

By their own laws encompassed, they take their fill of
treasure,
An drain earth's sweetest juices, till sweets, from surfeit, cloy,
Calling in gay carousals and revel-sated leisure,
For your fair daughters virgin, as tools to serve their pleasure :
Their foul lascivious ancients our lovely youth destroy.

Know ye what bitter portion to ye is harshly fated ?
Hard toil, wherefrom their riches they draw unto excess,
Black bread your tears have moistened, a life of serfdom hated,
Your maidens smirched and shameful, their happiness
frustrated ;
The heaven unto the mighty ; to ye, the bitter mess !

Rich men require no statutes, for virtue grows concurrent
When every want is furnished; for ye the lawyer's screed:
For ye the regulations, and punishments deterrent,
When forth your hands are reaching, for like's good gifts
aspirant ;
Exists there no forgiveness, e'en for your direst need.

Crush down the social order, accursed and unfair,
That 'twixt the poor and wealthy our human kind divides ;
Since after death remaineth no hope to make repair,
On this old earthly planet let each with other share ;
Be like a band of brothers that equally abides.

The naked antique Venus shatter to swift destruction !
Oh, fling in ruthless fury, unto the fire's fierce jaws,
Pictures of snow-nude bodies that wake the vain conception,
Sadly the heart disturbing, of ultimate perfection,
Working our maidens' downfall to lust's destroying claws !

Demolish all, unsparing, that pruriency engender ;
Raze palaces and temples that crimes from light defend ;
Statues of lord and tyrant to molten lava render ;
Wash out the servile footprints of they who basely pander,
Fawning behind the mighty unto wide word's end.

Yea, shiver unto atoms all pomp and ostentation,
And from its granite clothing our human life disrobe;
Cast off its gold an purple, its grief and nauseation;
Make life a dream unfathomed, a vision's emanation
That moveth to eternity exempt from passion's probe.

Build pyramids gigantic from out the desolation
As a *memento mori* from history to arise;
This is the art shall waken your minds in exaltation
To face the great eternal; not whoring degradation,
With mocking sneers grimacing; with vile and furtive eyes.

Oh, bring ye down the deluge; too long indeed ye waited
To see what goodly outcome would patient goodness get;
Came nothing...! The hyena by chatterers was replaced;
Unto the ancient cruelty was clemency translated;
Only the form is altered; remains the evil yet.

Ye'll turn then to the era of gold without alloying,
Whereof the far blue legends oft whisper to our sense;
Where free and equal pleasures all equal are enjoying;
When to life's transient flicker Death comes at last.
destroying,
'Twill seem to ye an angel with tresses fair and dense.

Then shall ye die, untroubled by love or sorrow's savour;
As on this planet ye have lived, your offspring shall succeed;
The death bell cease bewailing, with iron-tongued clangour,
Folk, to whom e'en old Fortune, hath shown her tender
favour;
None shall have cause for mourning the dead who lived
indeed.

The pestilent diseases of poverty's dire paining,
And eke of wealth abnormal, shall scourge not as of yore,
And they whose growth is destined shall grow without
restraining;
Until men will to break it, the cup they'll still be draining;
For none shall ever perish, till life can give no more.

. . . . . .

Beside the old Seine's waters, with pallid looks and sombrous,
In coach of gala splendour, the mighty Caesar passed ;
His brooding not distracted by thundrous waves upcast,
Nor yet by stony rumbling of equipages ponderous ;
In presence of his people, grown silent and abashed.

With ready smile and subtle, and piercing glances scornful
Probing the mind's recesses where secret thoughts abide ;
With raised hand controlling a world in pomp and pride
He greets upon his passage the ragged crowd and mournful,
Whereto his mighty grandour mysteriously is tied.

All loveless and unfriended, in lonely elevation,
Like ye, is he persuaded that malice and untruth
To human nature's bridle alone give orientation ;
And thus the scroll of history will wind through Time's
duration :
The hammer on the anvil — a tale that knows no ruth.

And he, the haughty summit of great oppressors blatant,
Saluteth in his passing his mute defender. Know ;
If from the world wert absent, thou, the dark cause and latent
Of mighty overthrowing, in grandeur, high and potent,
The Caesar, aye the Caesar, long since had fallen low.

Your shades, with savage outrage, that conquer kind confiding;
Your pitiless, cold smiling, no mercy can convoke ;
Your bitter mind all justice, as vain pretence, deriding ;
Dread powers, 'tis by your shadows, your shadows dark
misguiding,
He drives the poor and hostile to toil beneath his yoke.

. . . . . .

Paris in flames is seething, wherein the storm is bathing,
And towers, like inky torches flare crashing to their doom.
Through fiery tongues devouring, that rend in waves the
gloom
Great cries and clash of weapons sound from that ocean
blazing :
An epoch on its death-bed, with Paris for its tomb.

Dark streets in conflagration flash glares that daze the vision ;
A-top the barricading of heaped-up granite mounds,
To bloody conflict moving, the proletarian legion ;
Its pikes and muskets gleaming, and capped with bonnets Phrygian.
The belfries' clangour deafens, with hoarse discordant sounds.

Their arms with weapons laden, passing through vapors lurid,
The women of the people, with gorgeous raven hair
Veiling their tender bosoms; impassible and frigid,
Pallid and cold as marble ; the fire of rage and hatred
Fierce in their black eyes burning ; their eyes of deep despair.

Oh ! launch thee in the struggle, wrapped in thy splendid tresses !
Today reveals heroic the poor abandoned child.
Aloft the scarlet standard, with common justice blesses.
Hallows thy life besmirchèd, thy sins and foul excesses ;
Ah, no, not thine, the stigma ; but theirs who thee defiled !

. . . . . .

Glistens the tranquil ocean; its plates of gleaming crystal
Move each upon each other, in following sheets of grey.
O'er the mysterious forest with trackless groves sepulchral,
Their dark recesses flooding ; in azure fields celestial,
Large-faced, the full moon riseth, with proud triumphal eye.

In gentle rocking motion, on billows quietly flowing,
With battered wooden bare-bones, go vessels gaunt and old,
In grey and silent passing, like eerie spectres showing ;
The moon their bellied canvas is piercing with its glowing ;
It lingers as a token, a disk of fiery gold.

Beside the shore eroded, and worn with waves' emotion,
The Caesar keeps his vigil, where bent unto the ground,
Mournful the willow weepeth. Wide reaches of the ocean,
In fleet as lightning circles, all humbly make submission
To night's sweet silken breezes, and heave with cadent sound.

Amid the skies be-starrèd, to him a vision wended,
Treading the time-worn forests and splendid waters clear;
Hoar locks and brows be-darkened by sorrow's night,
descended;
The crown of straw hangs piteous, that idle winds have
rended;
. . . . . The ancient man, King Lear.

With mute amaze, he watches the figment of cloud shadows,
Betwixt the filmy tracery, that fair stars quivering pierce.
A host of changing phantoms across his mind swift follows;
Visions of wealth and radiance — scattered by stormy echoes;
The voices of the people; a world of sorrow fierce.

In every man is bosomed a world of dear endeavor,
Old Demiurgus vainly, but ceaseless, striving yet;
In every mind existing, the world demandeth ever
Whence hath it come, and wherefore it goeth hence, and
whither;
The flower of strange desiring, in chaos that was set.

The yearning for perfection: the universal essence,
Immutable it lurketh within the hearts of all;
'Tis sown at large by hazard; the tree in full florescence
Seeketh to find fulfilment in every blossom's naissance;
Yet ere its buds are fruited, the greater part will fall.

Thus frozen in its ripening, the human fruit grows rigid:
One to a slave; the other to emperor concealed,
Covering with tinselled follies his feeble life and arid;
Unto the sun revealing his face, forlorn and wretched;
His face, for in each bosom the same deep self's concealed.

The same desires resurgent — new habits yet enclosing,
For aye, the human fabric remaineth changeless still;
The world's malignant mystery in many shapes reposing;
To none the all-deceiver its secret strange disclosing,
With longing for the infinite the atom doth instil.

And when ye know this semblance will cease with your
expiring,
And after ye, unchangèd, dure all ye strove to mend,
This hasting here and thither, in anxious hope, aspiring
Fills with fatiguèd langor · one sole thought proves alluring :
"This world of life is merely a dream of Death eternal."

Translated by *Sylvia Pankhurst*
and *I. O. Stefanovici*

THE LAKE

(Lacul, 1876)

On the lake of forests, blue,
Yellow lilies are afloat.
The lake stirring ripples white
Gently sways a rowing boat.

And I pass along the shores,
Seem to listen, seem to rest,
Wait for her rise from the reeds,
Softly fall upon my chest.

Then step into the little bark,
Echoed by the water's tide
And I'll let slip the rudder
And slide the oars aside.

Floating along enchanted,
Under glow of the mild moon,
May wind rustle through the reeds,
May the shivering waters croon.

But she's not coming... solitude.
In vain I sigh and moan
Beside the lake so blue
By lilies overgrown.

Translated by *Irina Andone*
and *Kurt W. Treptow*

THE MIDNIGHT HOUR OF SORROW...

(Se bate miezul nopții, 1876)

The midnight hour of sorrow on brazen bell doth toll,
And sleep, life's toll-collector, comes not to take the toll.
On roads so often trodden Death wants to lead for aye,
And Life and Death comparing, which is the best to weigh;
But now my reason's balance unchanged still doth stand,
For 'tween them both is fixed, unmoved the pointing hand.

Translated by *Petre Grimm*

MELANCHOLY

(Melancolie, 1876)

It seems a gate has opened between the clouds forthright
And through it passes pearl-white the lifeless queen of night.
Oh, sleep, oh, sleep in quiet, among a thousand stars
Within your tomb of purple and in your silver vase —
Your stately mausoleum, the veils of heaven's vault —
You sweet, benighted monarch, whom we with love exalt!
So rich in vast expanses, the world lies wrapped in frost,
Which now both field and village with shining veil has
glossed;
The air itself is sparkling; the white frost seems to stain
The walls and ruins scattered upon the desert plain.
The solitary churchyard keeps watch with crooked crosses:
On one of them alighting, a grey owl sharp notes tosses.
The belfry posts are cracking, with bellboard sounds
vibrating;
The half-transparent demon, while through the air migrating
Has lightly touched the copper with its indented wing
And causes it to hollow, and mournfully to ring. The ruined
hermitage,
Lies desert, sad and pious, of venerable age;
Through broken doors and windows the wind blows cold
and sear
It seems it exorcises with words that you can hear;
Inside, on walls, the pillars and iconostasis,
All that remains are shadows and outlines sad, remiss;
As priest, a grig is weaving a dark thought, fine withal.
As verger drums the deathwatch within the aging wall.

. . . . . .

'Tis faith that paints the icons in sacred churches set,
While in my soul it rooted fine tales I still regret.
But life's devouring billows, storms raging right and left
Just melancholy shadows and sad contours have left.
I seek my world but vainly, within my wearied brains,
For magic crickets hoarsely charm out sad autumn strains;
My heart is just a desert that hands in vain are beating.
Its throb is like a deathwatch upon a coffin beating.
When on my life I ponder, it seems a steady flow —

A tale retold but slowly, by mouths I do not know —
As if I'd never lived it, or in it played some part !
Who is the man that tells me the story learnt by heart
Since I still listen to him — and laugh at what is said
As if at strangers' sorrows ?... It seems I've long been dead.

Translated by *Andrei Bantaş*

TO MY CRITICS

(Criticilor mei, 1876)

There are many flowers, but only
Few of them a fruit will bear,
All light seeking, but for many
Early death is all their share.

It is easy to write verses
When thou nothing hast to tell,
Like the pearls bare phrases stringing,
Word by word to rhyme them well;

But when longings, passions, tossing
Prey upon thy mind and heart,
Thou dost hear tumultuous voices,
Listening then to all thou art.

At the doors of thought all knocking,
Like the flowers for light they press,
They all want this world to enter,
Well adorned in speech's dress.

For thy whole life's deepest passions,
For thy suffering soul which cries,
Dost thou see the awful judges
With their cruel icy eyes?

O then on thy head so heavy
All the heaven seems to fall;
Where to find the word that fitly
Answers truth's and beauty's call?

Critics, you, like barren flowers,
Ever fruitless, know it well:
'Tis most easy to write verses,
When one nothing has to tell.

Translated by *Petre Grimm*

WITH DAYDREAMS AND WITH IMAGES

(Cu gîndiri şi cu imagini, 1876)

With daydreams and with images
Have I covered many pages :
Both of my life and of the book,
This from my youth I undertook.

My way of thinking don't follow :
'cause it's full of errors hollow,
Pursuing through the dark night's ire
The spectral dream of life entire.

Lacking both learning and maxims,
Fantasy without form, mere whims,
It wandered lost, oh ! when it came :
The thought is black, the verse is lame.

And ideas, simply inbred,
Which palpitate inside my head :
I did cover them with dressings,
Such opulent and senseless things.

Hybrids, they resemble amid
To the Egyptian pyramid :
In mountainside a tomb of stone
With icons from a time unknown,

In long alleys the sphinx mirrors
Monoliths and ancient pillars,
Make you believe, beyond the gates,
There a whole country dead awaits.

You go in, up the stairs you're drawn
And don't know what you'll find beyond.
Alone with dim candle light nigh
Does one king in a coffin lie.

Translated by *Irina Andone*
and *Kurt W. Treptow*

THE TALE OF THE FOREST

(Povestea codrului, 1878)

Glorious emperor is the forest,
Countless people live and grow.
Flourish 'neath his gracious shelter,
All to him allegia[illegible] owe.

Moon and stars, the sun above them,
On his blue escutcheon are,
Harts and hinds, his courtiers, wander
In his kingdom wide and far.

Messengers, the hares swift-footed,
Bear the news; while nightingales
Form an orchestra most wondrous,
And the springs are telling tales.

Swarms of wand'ring bees alight there
On the flowers, in the glade;
Ants, great armies, their food gather
Near the pathways, in the shade.

Let's go to the king, belovèd,
Let's like children be, let's dream,
So that love, and joy, our whole life,
As a game to us may seem.

And thus happy, blithely living,
Being now again a boy,
I should think that nature made thee
Just for me, the sweetest toy.

From the world we both will wander,
All alone and lost we'll be,
We shall sleep beside the fountain
Springing 'neath the old lime-tree.

And the tree will shed its flowers
On us, far away now borne ;
All alone, from distant sheepfolds,
Dreaming we shall hear the horn...

Nearer, always nearer sounding —
Nearer we'll be arm in arm...
On the waters, in the bowers
Weaves the moon a magic charm.

Soon by horn the wise men's council,
Called together by the king,
With his whole court's great assembly,
Comes around us gathering.

Foaming white the hippocampus,
Diademed the aurochs goes,
Stags with their majestic antlers,
And the nimble mountain roes.

Who we are, they all discuss it,
From the lime-tree ask it now ;
And our host then, gently speaking,
With his branches makes a bow :

"See how happy they are dreaming,
In a fairy tale they seem...
See how much they love each other !
'Tis the beech-wood's blissful dream !"

Translated by *Petre Grimm*

FOREST, O MY FOREST

(Revedere, 1879)

Forest, O my forest dear,
what dost thou so lonsome here ?
For since I have seen thee last
Many weary years have past,
And since I have gone away
In the world I much did stray.

— O, I do as in the past,
Listen to the winter's blast,
Which my branches tears and breaks,
Chains with ice my streams and lakes,
On my paths snow-hills will lay,
All my songsters drives away.
And I do, as long ago,
Listen when the women go
Singing their old *doina* song,
As they walk the path along,
To the fountain, where they still
Come their water pails to fill.

— Forest dear with quiet streams,
All in this world flowing seems ;
Time goes past, but only thou
Still art young and younger now.

— What is time, when every night
Shines for me the stars' still light !
Be the weather good or bad,
Be it sunny, be it sad,
Winds through rustling leaves still blow
And the Danube's waters flow.
Man alone is wavering,
Changeable and wandering,
While we all the same remain,
Mountains, rivers, the great main,

As we were so we abide,
This great world with deserts wide,
Sun, moon, stars, eternal things,
And the forest with its springs.

Translated by *Petre Grimm*

STAY WITH ME

(O, rămîi, 1879)

"Stay with me, o stay for ever,
I love you so much, my dear!
All your longing, all your yearning
Only I can truly hear;

In the darkness of the shadows
You appear as in the guise
Of a prince who sounds the waters
With his dark and gentle eyes;

Whereas I, through the waves' roaring,
Through the swaying of tall grass,
Teach you how to hear in secret
The great herds of deer that pass.

I see you enrapt in magic,
Humming a heart-soothing lay,
While your naked feet touch lightly
The bright water of some bay.

As you gaze at moonlit water
Shimmering like fiery tears,
All you life seems but a moment
And sweet moments seem long years..."

Thus the wood spoke e'er so gently,
Rocking tree-tops over me.
At its call, I whistled; laughing
I rushed out into the lea.

Were I to retrace those pathways,
I could hear its call no more...
Where, o childhood, have you vanished
With your forest, with your lore?

Translated by *Leon Levițchi*

A DACIAN'S PRAYER

(Rugăciunea unui dac, 1879)

When Death was not, and nothing immortal had been
wrought,
Nor light's divinest kernel the world its life had
brought,
When yesterday, tomorrow, today had yet no name.
When one was all, wherever, and all was one,
the same ;
When earth, and air, and heavens, the whole world that
is seen
Were in the deep abysm like things that have not
been —
Thou wast alone, and anxious myself I'm asking now :
Who is the God, to whom we, with hearts most humble,
bow ?

Sole God he was, when others were not, and in the dark
Unfathomable ocean gave force to light's first spark,
He is mankind's great savior and source of happiness,
To gods gives soul and power and everything doth bless;
Cheer up your hearts ! Adore him and praise in sacred hymn,
For life and resurrection from death all come through him !

He gave me eyes most happy that they may see the light,
He filled my heart with pity, with high, divine delight,
How through the world he paces in roaring winds I heard,
I heard in songs most holy his sweetest voice, his word,
And still one thing I ask him from inmost bosom's core :
That he may now allow me to rest for evermore !

To curse all those who pity will show for me, to bless
All those who make me suffer and ruthlessly oppress,
To those who spurning mock me to listen, and believe,
And to the arm that kills me the utmost force to give,
And he among all others as first may praised be
Who e'en my stony pillow will steal away from me.

Pursued by all and hunted shall pass away my years
Till they will have exhausted the fountain of my tears,
Till I shall feel that each man for me is but a foe,
Till my own self thus hated by all I shall not know,
Till endless pain and anguish my heart have so oppressed
That I may curse my mother whom I, of all, loved best —
When utmost cruel hatred like love seems to my eye,
My suffering forgetting, perhaps I might then die.

And if, by all accursed, I die a stranger, they
Upon the street my body to dogs shall throw away,
And him who sets them on me, that they may tear my heart,
O him, my gracious Father, the highest crown impart,
And him who stones will on me with hatred throw, O give
My Lord, that he in glory eternally may live!

Thus only can I, Father, sing praises thanking Thee,
That graciouly Thou gavest this earthly boon to me.
I do not bend my forehead for other gifts; Thy ire,
Thy curses and Thy hatred are all that I desire,
To feel how disappearing my breath by Thine is quelled,
And in the night eternal I traceless am dispelled.

Translated by *Petre Grimm*

SONNET : LIKE CLOUDS O'ER PLAINS

(Afară-i toamnă, 1879)

Like clouds o'er plains have passed the years so long.
And back again they'll never more be wiled,
They charm no longer as they charmed, beguiled
The youth, those tales and riddles, that sweet song,

Scarce understood, delightful for the child,
With meaning full, for which I much did long —
In vain surrounds me now thy shadows' throng
O hour of mystery, O twilight mild !

Of life's dear past how can I hear the chimes,
And make thee tremble now again, my soul ?
In vain I play my lyre, in vain I hearken :

'Tis dumb the lovely voice of those old times,
My youth is far, my joy is lost, the whole,
And Time runs fast behind... My mind doth darken !

Translated by *Petre Grimm*

SONNET : VENICE

(Veneția, 1880)

'Tis gone the life of Venice with its pride —
No songs are heard, nor seen are lights of balls,
On marble stairs, on portals, in the halls,
The moon's pale rays alone all whitening glide.

In the canals Oceanus wailing calls...
He only will forever young abide,
Fain would he give life's breath to his sweet bride,
His sounding waves are beating mouldering walls.

A churchyard silence o'er the town doth lower.
A priest whom ages left in his old fane,
St Mark strikes sinister the midnight hour.

In rhythmic numbers, softly, in deep strain,
In language sibylline sounds from the tower :
"The dead do not awake — it is in vain."

Translated by *Petre Grimm*

OF THE MASTS

(Dintre sute de catarge, 1880)

Of the masts by hundreds leaving
Shores which many an ocean laves,
O, how many will be shattered
By the winds and by the waves ?

Of the birds by thousands wandering
Many a one a grave soon finds,
While still hopeful it is driven
By the waves and by the winds.

If to high ideals aspiring,
Or the soul but fortune craves,
Thou art driven wheresoever
By the winds and by the waves.

Never understood the thought is
That the song in wing'd words binds,
Ever floating, far-off echoed
By the waves and by the winds.

Translated by *Petre Grimm*

FIRST SATIRE

(Scrisoarea I, 1881)

When with weary eyes the candle I blow out, my thoughts still stray,
While the clock alone is treading on old Time's unending way,
If I draw aside the curtains, in the middle of the night,
All the room at once is flooded with the moon's voluptuous light;
From the deep night of remembrance back again she doth recall
An eternity of sorrows and in dream we feel them all.

Moon, the world's vault gliding over, Queen who dost o'er oceans reign,
Giving life to thoughts, thou soothest with sweet balm our endless pain:
Deserts vast and lonely glisten 'neath thy clear light, purest maid,
And the sparkling spring that's hidden far away in forest glade!
On how many countless billows doth thy power hold its sway,
When thou glidest forth on ocean's moving solitary way!
And what flowered shores, what cities and what palaces are shown,
Through thy magic charm transfigured, but to thee, to thee alone!
Through how many thousand windows dost thou enter still and soft,
Shining mild on brows which ponder, into eyes that look aloft!
There a king, great plans combining, round the globe a web doth twine.
While what he will do tomorrow scarce a poor man can divine...
Though their lots are cast asunder, both are doomed by fate's great might,

Both are swayed by death's grim genius and the ray of thy
pure light;
Slaves of the same chain of passions in this same world,
willy-nilly,
Be they weak, or be they mighty, be they geniuses or silly.
This one, pleased with his own image, in the mirror curls
his hair,
While through space and time another searches for what's
true and fair,
He from yellow leaves will gather countless trifles, one by one,
And their transient names well scoring, this is all that he
has done;
While a third, behind his counter, marks what he has bought
and sold,
In his grandest dreams sees only galleons freighted down
with gold.

There alone the aged Master silently is reasoning,
Leaning on his worn-out elbows, lost in endless reckoning,
Lank and slender, bent and crooked, shivering as he doth
linger,
All the universe unmeasured resting on his little finger.
For there under his broad forehead past and future, all is
clear,
The eternal night, vast spaces, all like problems solved appear;
And like Atlas who in old times bore the skies upon his
shoulders,
So he all supports with numbers — the eternal world's
upholders.

While the moon shines on piled volumes, he returneth with
his mind
In a twinkling over aeons, endless centuries behind.
First of all, in the beginning, in the utter nothingness,
With no being, no existence, lifeless, will-less, purposeless,
When there was no thought, no secret, and yet nothing was
disclosed.
When, himself alone conceiving, sole the Unconceived reposed,
Was there nothing but a chasm filled with waters? An Abyss?
There was yet no world imagined, and no mind to think of
this,

For there was an utter darkness, not the slightest ray of light,
Nothing to be seen whatever, not an eye to pierce with sight:
Shadows of things uncreated had not yet begun to creep,
Quiet, with itself contented, reigned calm peace, eternal sleep!
But at once a point, one only... it moved onward, fast and faster,
Chaos was its Mother; Father it became and world's great master.
Weaker than from froth the bubble, this point, from which all things soared,

Moving on the world's great vastness, it became the boundless lord.
Since then all that mist eternal, streak by streak, was soon dispelled,
Since then rose sun, moon, the whole world, elements their power held.
Since then up to this day always, colonies of worlds long lost
Through the deep grey vales of chaos are on unknown pathways tossed.
Springing forth like swarms effulgent, from the infinite come thronging.
They to life allured are driven by an unquenched thirst and longing.
And in that great world, we, nothings, children of this little one,
Build on earth our tiny ant-hills, heaping riches we have won:
Kings and emperors, hosts unnumbered, in successive generations,
We think marvellous, Great Powers, our poor microscopic nations;
Flies that live a day, forgetting, in a tiny network trapped,
That this world is but a twinkle, and in utter darkness wrapped
Like the dust that dances gaily in the kingdom of a ray,
From the sight soon disappearing when that beam has gone away,
So too, in this everlasting, deep night of eternity
Shines a ray, a passing instant, in the vast immensity;
When extinguished, like a shadow, back to darkness will be hurled
This vain dream of a nonbeing, all this fleeting phantom world.

But the thinker in the present doth not stop, his mind is led
In a twinkling over aeons, endless centuries ahead :
This resplendent sun, so beauteous, now he sees it brown-red, dull,
Like a wound in dark clouds, dreary, or in storms a drifting hull ;
All the planets, which no longer curbs with mighty reins the sun,
Frozen in their hearts, as maddened, wildly through the spaces run.
Like a temple that is shattered, breaks in pieces all this sphere,
Like the leaves in autumn falling, all the stars now disappear,
And all time is dead and buried, it becomes eternity.
Nothing happens now and empty is the vast immensity,
In the deep night of nonbeing everything again doth creep,
Quiet, with itself contented, reigns calm peace, eternal sleep.

. . . . . .

From the lowest to the highest, from the beggar to the king,
With their painful life's enigma all are vainly laboring.
Who is the most miserable ? Who in this poor world can say?
All are like, and over others rises only he who may,
While so many, humble-hearted, lying in the shadow, thrown
From the way, or tossed or driven, like the foam will die unknown.
What doth blind fate care whatever for their wishes, thoughts or strife ?
Like the stormy wind it passes over this poor human life.

If he's praised by all his fellows and acknowledged by his age,
What will he win from these praises for himself the wise old sage ?
Immortality ! Yea, truly all that he could do and be
Twined around one great idea, like the ivy to the tree.
"Though I die — he says — like others, centuries will bear my fame
Everywhere and through all ages, and from mouth to mouth my name
Borne along with all my writings, in this world's uproar and welter,

In uncounted minds alighting, they will find a quiet shelter!"
Poor old man, dost thou remember all that thou hast seen
and heard,
All that thou thyself hast spoken, every name and every word?
Here and there perhaps an image, or the traces of a thought,
But a word, a slip of paper, all just little more than nought.

When thy life thou scarcely knowest thinkest thou that
others care
Thoroughly to know thy story or thy memory to spare?
Later, some pedantic scholar, on the trashy volumes' pile
Sitting, trash himself, will study in thy books the Atti style,
Showing some mistakes and errors, which thou madest long
ago,
And the dust of those old volumes from his spectacles will
blow;
To reward thy toil he'll give thee, great attention, learned sage,
Two lines in a random footnote, ending thus a stupid page.

One may build a world, destroy it: over what one thinks
holds fast.
Whatsoe'er it be, a shovel full of earth is thrown at last.
Heads a universe enclosing, sceptered hands desiring sway
Over empires vast unbounded, 'tween four boards must lie
one day...
There a funeral procession gravely, solemnly advances,
So ironically splendid, with indifferent side glances:
And some little man's oration, this will be of all the ending,
Not thy character extolling, but himself at last commending
Under thy good name's great shadow: this is all that waits
for thee.

But posterity e'en fairer still will be, O thou wilt see...
Since they could not reach thy standard, thinkest thou they
will admire?
The biographer so artful, who fulfils all their desire,
Him they'll praise, when he will show that thou resemblest
all the others,
Not a genius, but so common, that you well might have been
brothers.

All are highly flattered thinking that thou wert not more than they,
And with pride their nostrils swelling, their stupidity display;
Always when they talk about thee in their learned coteries,
With ironic smile to praise thee, in mere words, well settled 'tis.
Falling to their hands, with pleasure, with great joy they'll dust thy jacket.
They will judge with understanding, without seeing that they lack it...
They will seek out all thy blunders, out of malice sheer to blame thee,
To find all the little scandals, every blemish, to defame thee —
This is all that brings thee near them, not the light that thou hast shed
In this world of sin and sorrow, but the faults, the sins inbred,
And the lassitude, the weakness, all that may impair thy worth,
Evils fatally inherent in a handful of this earth ;
Miseries of poor tormented human soul, for everyone
These will be the things that please them, not what thou hast thought and done.

. . . . . .

In this springtime, on the gardens, on the blossoms fragrant, tender,
On the beautiful, wide landscape, sheds the moon her quiet splendor !
She from deep night of remembrance countless longings doth recall,
Soothing endless pains and sorrows, now in dreams we feel them all,
To our own thought's world she opens wide and large an entrance door,
Raising round us endless shadows, marvels of the dark before...
Deserts vast and lonely glisten 'neath thy clear light, purest maid,
And the sparkling spring that's hidden far away in forest glade !

On how many countless billows doth thy power hold its sway,
When thou glidest forth on ocean's moving solitary way,
And o'er all of us abiding under fate's grand, awful might,
Sways alike grim death's great genius and the ray of thy
pure light!

Translated by *Petre Grimm*

THIRD SATIRE

(Scrisoarea III, 1881)

Once upon a time a Sultan, ruler over nomad bands,
Roaming with their herds and seeking pastures new in many lands,
On the earth lay sleeping, pillowed was his head upon his arm,
But his eyes, beneath closed lashes, now awoke in dream's sweet charm.
From the sky down gliding gently, all in silver dress arrayed,
Came the moon towards him descending as a pure and lovely maid,
On her pathway, all around her, as on mild spring's step did bloom,
Yet her eyes were full of shadows born of secret sorrow's gloom,
All the woods with so much beauty charmed were thrilling with delight.
All the brooks and rivers quivered with their limpid faces bright,
Diamond dust was lightly falling from above like finest rain,
Glitt'ring in the air, on flowers, over all in nature's reign,
In the night resplendent rainbows arching on the sky were seen,
And bewitching, softly whispered, sounded music sweet, serene...
Lovely arms she stretched towards him as he lay, her raven hair
Fell like silken waves down streaming on her snowy shoulders bare :
— "Let our lives be bound together, come, beloved, to my breast,
Soothing balm to my sweet sorrow be thy sorrow, near me rest...
This in Life's book for all ages on the stars did Fate record :
I must be thy sovereign lady, thou must be my life's dear lord."

As to her he looked and listened, darkening she disappeared;
From his heart sprang up a tree that towards the sky
its branches reared.
And it grew, it grew in moments as in ages long,
this tree
Shot its boughs with massy foliage over all, on land
and sea.
Underneath the shadows creeping over all the world
disperse,
One great shadow now embracing all the boundless
universe.
On the four points of th'horizon the gigantic mountain
ranges,
Atlas, Caucasus and Taurus, and the Balkans hoar
with ages,
And the Tigris, the Euphrates and the Nile, the Danube old,
All the world th'unmeasured shadow of this tree did
now enfold.

Vast expanses, Asia, Europe, Africa with deserts wide,
With their seashores and their harbors, and strong cities
on each side,
On the seas and on the rivers galleons rocking
on the waves,
And the undulating cornfields, riches, all that man's
heart craves,
Linked together, countries, nations, wherever'er his eyes
would stray
A vast carpet intermingling countless hues before him
lay.
Through a greyish mist transparent there before his eager
view,
Under one tree's shadow only an all-powerful empire grew.
Towards the sky the eagles flying to its branches could
not soar;
Loud and victory presaging, a strong wind began to roar,
And the rustling foliage wildly in the stormy blast was rent,
Cries of battle, Allah! Allah! to the highest clouds were
sent.
And the tumult grew tremendous like a high tempestuous
sea,
Shouts of triumph, shouts of horror, howling now
unceasingly;

But with spear-like leaves the branches in the tossing winds
contending,
Over the new Rome inclining to the earth were lowly
bending.

. . . . . .

Shaken by his dream the Sultan wakened... looking upwards,
there
On the sky the moon was gliding o'er the hills of Eski-Shehr,
And behind a latticed window smiling was a face so meek,
'Twas the graceful child, the daughter of Edèbali, the sheik,
Like a hazel twig so slender, haloed by the bright full moon,
Dreaming, on the casement leaning stood the fair maid
Malcatoon.
Then he knew that the great Prophet had imagined this
device,
That in dream he had ascended in Mohammed's
paradise,
And that from his love an empire would be born and wide
would grow.
But its destined years and limits Heaven could alone
foreknow.

So, as Fate decreed, the passing ages proved his vision
true,
Like an eagle soaring upwards every year the empire
grew,
Sultan after sultan followed, their green banner rose still
higher,
Nation after nation conquered was by them with sword
and fire,
Country after country open all the ways for them did set...
Full of glory to the Danube came the stormy Bajazet.

At a sign with floating vessels shore to shore was quickly
bound,
The whole army crossing over to the martial trumpets'
sound.

Janizaries, Allah's children, spahis, with their spears and shields,
Swarmed like bees, the whole earth darkening on Rovine's[1] marshy fields,
Numberless their high tents pitching, waiting for the battle grim;

Ominous the oak-woods rustled looming in the distance dim.
A peace messenger came bearing on a rod a kerchief white.
Bajazet then asked him, looking as to one whom he did slight:
— "Say, what wantest thou?"
— "Your Highness, peace is all we come to seek,
If you grant it, fain our lord would with the gracious emperor speak."
At a sign the way was opened, to the tent with nobleness
Came an old man plain and simple in his words and in his dress.
— "Thou art Mîrcea?"
— "Yes, High Sultan!"
— "For thine homage here came I,
Lest thy crown to thorns be changed, with my will thou must comply."
— "Howsoe'er thou camest, Sultan, and whate'er thy thought may be,
While we are in peace and quiet, as a friend I welcome thee.
As for vassal's homage, pardon! but our honor this denies:
Would'st thou with thy warring armies this poor country now chastise?
Give us rather, mighty Sultan, a high token of thy grace
And magnanimously leave us, back again thy way retrace...
Be the one or be the other, what our fate may have in store,
Gladly shall we bear it always, be it peace or be it war."
— "When the world to me is open, thinkest thou that I can bear
That my mighty host should stumble on a stump that's lying there?

[1] Rovine (pron. Roveena), a marshy plain near the Danube where Mircea Basarab (pron. Meerchah), ruler of Wallachia (1386—1418) vanquished the sultan Bajazet. He also took part at the battle of Nicopolis (1314) in the last crusade of the West against the Turks.

O thou knowest not how many in my way with armies pressed!
All the heroes bold and famous, all the glory of the West.
All that 'neath the cross was gathered, kings and emperors great did form
An innumerable army 'gainst the crescent's furious storm.
In their shining mail, well armoured, and in martial proud array
Came the dauntless knights of Malta bold and eager for the fray;
And the Pope, the triple-crowned, all his gathered thunders sent
'Gainst the thunder that most direful earth and sea with rage had rent [1].

At a sign, like rivers flooding from the mountain, field and wood,
The whole West sent forth its nations, for the glory of the Rood.
And they came, the whole world shaking from its deepest quietness,
Darkening the far horizon with their shields, spears numberless.
On the land like moving forests they advanced in awful might,
By their daring galleons shaken, trembled e'en the sea with fright...
At Nicopolis thou sawest how they camped, assembling all,
To my power there opposing an unshaken bulwark wall;
When I saw them there as many as the sands are on the shore,
With an unquenched hate I muttered in my beard, an oath I swore,
Over them to tread, to crush them, ruthlessly my way to force,
And in Rome, on Peter's altar make a manger for my horse.
And my hurricane, that's sweeping all away like dust and chaff,
Thinkest thou that thou canst stay it only with an old man's staff?"

[1] Allusion to the name of Sultan Bayezid "the Thunder-bolt."

— "Yes, 'tis true, an old man, Sultan! but the man thou
dost behold
Is a man not of the common, but Wallachia's ruler bold.
I wish not that thou shouldst ever come our direful wrath
to know,
That thy mighty hosts should perish in the Danube's
angry flow.
Yet in olden times full many, on their way all conquering,
First of all and the most famous, great Darius, Persian king,
Built a bridge on our old Danube, battling o'er with might
and main,
Fright'ning all around and thinking the whole world was
their domain:
Emperors whom the vastest empires could within their
bounds not hold,
Came here asking earth and water, as in olden tales is told,
And I do not wish to frighten, nor do I now wish to boast,
They were turned to earth and water, nought was left of
all their host.
Thou dost boast that thou couldst conquer, all before thee
crushing down,
Emperors proud, great hosts, well armored, bravest knights
of high renown,
Thou dost boast the Western powers all their armies 'gainst
thee pressed,
But what urged them to the battle, what allured the
glorious West?
They would fain have torn the laurels from thy iron brow
so bright,
Victory for faith and glory — this was sought by every
knight.
I do here defend my country, my poor nation in distress,
Therefore all that here is stirring, friends to me with help
will press:
Men, all creatures, woods and rivers, everything will be
thy foe,
And the meaning of our hatred to its fulness thou wilt know.
Armies have we not, but know it, love of country is a wall
That by fear is never shaken, nothing ever makes it fall!"

Scarce the old man had departed, when with storm the
forest torn
Rustled, roared with shouts and clangour, sounds of arms
and sounds of horn.

Coming from the dark, deep shadows, on the green skirts of the wood,
Thousands, thousands of bright helmets, long-haired yeomen gathered stood.
At a sign together swarming, on their horses, wild and fleet,
On the panting flanks the riders with their wooden stirrups beat,
Like a dust cloud, storm foretelling, lightly, swiftly on they sped,
Shield on shield gave back the sunlight, spear points glittered over head,
As from copper clouds in autumn hail storms driven by the blast,
Hide in darkness the horizon, so sharp arrows flashing passed,
Whizzing, singing, hurtling, ringing, filled the air with dread alarms,
And to thundering horsehoofs echoed cries of battle, clash of arms.
Vainly like the fiercest lion did the sultan roar and rage,
Death's grim shadow grew still greater on all those who war did wage:
Vainly to arouse their spirits did they lift the Prophet's flag,
For on front, on flanks fast seizing Death did all to ruin drag;
Wavering whole troops were shaken, thinned fell down long battle rows,
The Arabians fell like grass-blades, when a man his meadow mows,
Horsemen from their steeds were tumbled, footmen beaten to their knees.
And the arrows came like billows surging on tempestuous seas,
Like the frost from all sides biting, and it seemed as if the world,
To the darkest depths down falling, heaven and hell on earth were hurled.
Mircea led himself in battle this fierce storm so wildly rushing,
Coming on and on, in fury, all beneath it trampling, crushing.
Vanquished were the foe's great armies, scattered, cast away, like rags.

And victoriously advancing came the country's blessed
flags.
As in wind the chaff is winnowed, so the paynims were
dispersed,
To the Danube they were driven, as within a flood immersed,
That doth carry all resistless to the raging sea's wild coast,
And behind them came in triumph the Romanian glorious
host.

As to rest the army settled, gorgeously the sun went down,
As if victory's bright nimbus the land's highest crests would
crown,
Like a long and lasting lightning, that with splendor now
did rest,
O'er the dark high rising mountains, our land's bulwark
toward the West.
From the deep night of the ages, one by one, the stars
came, soon
From the mists, o'er dark green forests, shimmering appeared
the moon.
The great queen of night and oceans, peace and sleep to all
things sent.
A young son of our bold ruler watchful sat beside his tent,
Smiling with a dear remembrance, while the calm moon
shone above,
On his knee a letter writing, home to send it to his love:

From Rovine, in a dale
Lady mine, I send this mail.
Many things I have to say,
But thou art so far away.
I must send all in a letter,
Since I cannot now do better.
Lady dear, this soul of mine
Yearns for all that's truly thine,
For thine eyes, sweet, smiling, good,
For the springs, the fields, the wood.
Send them, for I too send, dear,
All that is most lovely here,
My proud host with banners glorious,
Over our great foes victorious,
And with them will come together

My bright helm with peacock feather
And my brows, my loving eyes :
All to thee, with longing hies.
Thanking Christ, God save my soul !
I am safe and sound and whole.
With my love I send thee this,
Thy sweet lips, sweet soul, I kiss.

. . . . . .
. . . . . .

Such were those old times that happy chroniclers and poets knew,
Our own age is full of jugglers, mountebanks and all their crew.
In the legends and old annals may the heroes still be found.
Shall I greet with dreamy music, with my lyre and flute's sweet sound
All these patriots who later in their heritage did follow ?
Oh ! before all these, with horror, veil and hide thyself, Apollo !
You were hid in glorious shadows of the past, O heroes bold!
But it is the newest fashion, with your fame from annals old
Our own hollow times to brighten, and to drape with it those fools,
Who your golden age are smirching with their prose, their filthy pools.
Bassarabs, Mushats [1], in holy shadows stay, you noble race,
Settlers of the land and givers of new laws, you who did trace
With the spade and plough new frontiers for a country large and free,
Far extending from the mountains to the Danube and the sea.
Is not great our present ? Does not all that one can wish abound ?
In our throng is there not any precious jewel to be found ?
Is not here the Sybaritic temple of false glories, none
But are offsprings of the taverns, reputations cheaply won !
See we not the fighting heroes, who with rhetor's lances meet,
Thus exciting the loud plaudits of the rabble in the street ?
Dancers on the rope, impostors, jugglers, rivals for the prize,
Famous masquerading actors in the comedy of lies.

[1] Basarab and Mushat : the names of the two ruling families of Wallachia and Moldavia.

Does the liberal not always speak of virtue, country-love ?
One would think his life is crystal, like the purest sky above.
You would not think that before you is a coffee-house supporter,
Who at his own words is laughing, a mere ape, a word distorter.
See that soulless, heartless being, with big jaws, and swollen face,
Monster in whom all the vices find the fittest meeting place,
Swarthy, hunchbacked, greedy, wily, he with all the ruffians leagues,
And imparts to his low fellows all his venomous intrigues.
On their lips is always virtue, but their souls are hollow shells,
Worthlessness in these mere nothings, void from top to bottom, dwells.
Mustering his army's numbers, eagerly and well-pleased spies
Over all that hideous monster with his swollen, frog-like eyes.
Such are those whom our land choosing representatives must call,
Men who fitly would be gathered all behind some bedlam's wall,
In long shirt and with a fool's cap : these assemble now and thus,
Making laws and fixing taxes, they our public weal discuss.
Patriots and pious founders of establishments like those
Where in words, in deeds, in gestures, lewdness, only lewdness shows.
They in parliament assemble, sit admiring there each other's
Thick, stiff necks or long, thin noses, all these Greek, Bulgarian brothers.
Heirs of the great Roman empire are they all, and everyone
Of his ancestors is boasting, being Trajan's great-grandson !
And this mob, this scum, this vermin, this our country's desolation,
They should now become our leaders, rulers of this once great nation !
All that in the neighb'ring countries was deformed and misbegotten,
All that's stained with foul corruption's mark by nature, all that's rotten,

All these helots, mean and greedy, which the Phanar[1] here has sent,
Self-styled patriots, so-called brothers, on their selfish schemes intent,
Babblers, stutterers, and cretins, wry-mouthed wretches, now grown great
Are your masters, — yes, these prattlers are the pillars of the state.

You the heirs of Rome? You, eunuchs, of her fame are boasting when
All the world, with horror shrinking, is ashamed to call you men!
And this pestilence, these creatures with their nasty mouths proclaim
That they are the country's saviors, and they dare, they have no shame,
All the glory of our nation with their filth but to besmear
And thy holy name pronouncing to disgrace it, country dear!

In the lupanars, in Paris, day and night you have been seen
With the most depraved of women and in revelry obscene,
You have lost your youth and fortune, gambling, drinking, wild and lewd,
How could Paris make you better, since in you yas nothing good?
Wearing monocles like dandies, with a little walking cane,
You came back, your heads pomaded, in your brains did nought remain
But some waltz learnt in the ballrooms, nothing else was left behind:
And all prematurely withered, with an empty childish mind,
And a harlot's dancing slippers, all the wealth you did acquire...
I admire you, proudest offspring of the Romans, I admire!

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[1] The Romanian principalities, fallen under the Turkish yoke, were governed during the 18th century by Greek princes sent by the Turks from the Phanar of Constantinople. Many of these princes, with their followers, had devastated the country.

Now you look amazed and frightened to our cold and
sceptic eyes,
And you wonder why no longer we can listen to your lies?
When we see that all these loafers, who with great words
make such din,
Are but chasing after money, cheaply, without work to win.
If these polished, empty phrases, all this idle talk, my
brothers,
Cannot cheat us any longer, is it now the fault of others?
Too much did you this poor country with our foes to pieces
tear,
Too much did you shame our nation, too much, too much
did you dare
Our most holy things, our customs, language, ancestors defile!
But we have now all your measure, O you scoundrels mean
and vile!
Yes, to gain without an effort is your end, and rich to be,
Virtue is the merest folly, genius is but misery!

Let the ancestors sleep soundly in their annals' dusty book,
From their glorious past they surely down on you with
scorn would look.
Where art thou, old prince, Vlad Tzepesh[1], on them all to
lay thy hands
Treating them as rogues and madmen, to divide them into
bands,
Throw them into two big houses, as with others thou didst
whilom,
Setting fire unto the prison, and the lunatic asylum.

Translated by *Petre Grimm*

[1] Vlad (Dracula), ruler of Wallachia in the 15th century, famous for his cruelty; surnamed Tzepesh (The Impaler) because after a victory against the sultan Mehmet II he impaled all the prisoners. He is said to have imprisoned in a house all the thieves he could catch, afterwards setting it on fire.

GLOSS

(Glosă, 1882)

Days go past and days come still,
All is old and all is new,
What is well and what is ill,
You imagine and construe;
Do not hope and do not fear,
Wawes that leap like waves must fall;
Should they praise or should they jeer,
Look but coldly on it all.

Things you'll meet of many a kind,
Sights and sounds, and tales no end,
But to keep them all in mind
Who would bother to attend?...
Very little does it matter,
If you can yourself fulfil,
That with idle, empty chatter
Days go past and days come still.

Little heed the lofty ranging
That cold logic does display
To explain the endless changing
Of this pageantry of joy,
And which out of death is growing
But to last an hour or two;
For the mind profoundly knowing
All is old and all is new.

As before some troupe of actors,
You before the world remain;
Act they Gods, or malefactors,
'Tis but they dressed up again.
And their loving and their slaying,
Sit apart and watch, until
You will see behind their playing
What is well and what is ill.

What has been and what to be
Are but of a page each part
Which the world to read is free.
Yet who knows them off by heart?
All that was and is to come
Prospers in the present too,
But its narrow modicum
You imagine and construe.

With the selfsame scales and gauges
This great universe to weigh,
Man has been for thousand ages
Sometimes sad and sometimes gay;
Other masks, the same old story,
Players pass and reappear,
Broken promises of glory;
Do not hope and do not fear.

Do not hope when greed is staring
O'er the bridge that luck has flung,
These are fools for not despairing,
On their brows though stars are hung;
Do not fear if one or other
Does his comrades deep enthrall,
Do not let him call you brother,
Waves that leap like waves must fall.

Like the sirens' silver singing
Men spread nets to catch their prey,
Up and down the curtain swinging
Midst a whirlwind of display.
Leave them room without resistance,
Nor their commentaries cheer,
Hearing only from a distance,
Should they praise or should they jeer.

If they touch you, do not tarry,
Should they curse you, hold your tongue,
All your counsel must miscarry
Knowing who you are among.

Let them muse and let them mingle,
Let them pass both great and small;
Unattached and calm and single,
Look but coldly on it all.

Look but coldly on it all,
Should they praise or should they jeer;
Waves that leap like waves must fall,
Do not hope and do not fear.
You imagine and construe
What is well and what is ill;
All is old and all is new,
Days go past and days come still.

Translated by *Corneliu Popescu*

A CHARM OBSCURE AND SAD

(Un farmec trist și nențeles, 1882)

A charm obscure and sad,
It binds in all my power,
And by it always led,
Of life I've gained no hour.

It is a morning star that rose
Out from oblivion's mist,
An infinite horizon shows
To lonely sea amidst.

Remains forever withered
And its descent is nigh,
When, wandering with it,
The water's cold waves sigh.

With so many hidden yearnings,
With so many whispers trite,
With so many tears burning,
Shed all day and all the night,

You've prayed to it : unspeakable desire
Out from your soul to cast,
But it rises ever higher,
Out of your reach it's past.

It will forever be unknown
And it will shine above,
From past its light is shown
To the forsaken love.

Upon horizon it is flaring
Over desert of steppe and sea,
Without I comprehending
Its weary charm subdued me.

Translated by *Irina Andone*
and *Kurt W. Treptow*

ODE
(In Ancient Meter)

(Odă în metru antic, 1883)

I never believed I'd ever learn to die,
Forever young, wrapped in my gown,
My dreamy eyes I've often lifted to the star
Of solitude.

When at once you rose in my way,
You, suffering, painfully sweet,
To the bottom I drank the great delight of death
Unmerciful.

In woe I burn alive, tortured like Nessus,
Or like Hercules poisoned by his cloth,
My fire I cannot extinguish, with all
Waters of the Sea.

Of my own dream consumed, I moan,
On my own pyre in flames, I perish,
Can I rise again brightly out of it,
Like the Phoenix ?

May the tempting eyes vanish from the way,
Come back to my heart sorrowful indifference ;
That I can die peacefully, to me
Restore myself !

Translated by *Irina Andone*
and *Kurt W. Treptow*

OVER TREE TOPS

(Peste vîrfuri, 1883)

Over tree tops moon is floating,
The woods gently shiver leaves,
Through branches of alder trees,
Mournfully the horn is sounding.

Ever farther, ever farther,
Ever softer, ever softer,
It my troubled soul brings grace
With a wish for death's embrace.

Why keep silent, when enchanted,
As I my heart to you do give ?
Will you ever, while I live,
Sound sweet horn from me departed ?

Translated by *Irina Andone*
and *Kurt W. Treptow*

HYPERION

(Luceafărul, 1883)

Upon a time, as people said
In fairy-tales of old,
There lived a high-born, royal maid
Of grace and charm untold.

She was her parents' only child,
In all beyond compare,
As is 'mid saints the Virgin mild,
The Moon 'mid stars, so fair.

She leaves the stately colonnade ;
Her steps will gain anon
The window where, beyond the shade,
Awaits Hyperion.

She looked and saw how on the seas
He rose and shone e'ermore,
How the black-painted argosies
On restless paths he bore.

She sees him nightly, now, anew,
Straight follows the desire ;
He, gazing for some fortnights, too,
Grows brighter with new fire.

And as she, dreamful, rests her head
Upon her snow-white hands,
To love for him her soul is wed,
Her heart with love expands.

And with what brightness does he spark
And glitter every night,
When in the castle's shadows dark
She comes into his sight !

★

And step by step pursuing her,
He glides into her room
And weaves a glistening gossamer
Upon his frozen loom.

And when, to seek her nightly rest,
Supine in bed she lies,
He strokes her hands crossed on her breast
And closes her sweet eyes.

Upon her body mirrors cast
A flood of golden light,
Upon the eyes that beat so fast
Beneath their lids closed tight.

She smiled at him with sweet assent,
He in the glass did thrill
And in her dreams pursued her, bent
On winning of her will.

While sleeping deeply in her room,
She heaves a heavy sigh :
"O gentle sov'reign of my gloom,
Will you not come? Draw nigh!

Descend, o mild Hyperion,
Glide down upon a ray,
Into my home and thoughts anon
And brighten up my way!"

The more he thrilled at such discourse,
The brighter kindled he ;
He hurled himself with all his force
And sank into the sea ;

The water where he fell whirled round
In ripples and, forsooth,
From the mysterious profound
Up sprang a princely youth.

A threshold is not easier spanned
Than is the window's edge;
He has a truncheon in his hand
And it is crowned with sedge.

A very voivode, he was young,
Had soft and golden hair,
A knotted purple mantle hung
Upon his shoulders bare.

The shade of his translucid face
Was white, as white as snow —
A handsome corpse with living eyes
That cast abroad their glow.

"However hard, I left my sky
To gratify your plea,
My father is the heaven high,
My mother is the sea.

To slip into your room and, dumb,
To gaze at you from near,
Down with my azure am I come,
Born from the water's sphere.

O come, my treasure! Leave afar
The world where you abide;
My love, I am the evening star
And you shall be my bride.

We shall the coral castles gain,
There will you dwell for aye,
And all the people of the main
Shall unto you obey."

"You are so very handsome, yea
Like angels in a dream —
But I shall never go the way
You show me with your beam.

You're alien-spoken, alien-bred,
And lifeless is your glow,
I am alive and you are dead,
Your eyes they freeze me so."

*

There passed a day, then three, then four,
The night closed in again,
And over her the star once more
His beams serene did rain.

By images of him o'erawed
So often in her sleep,
She felt a yearning for the lord
Of the unquiet deep.

"Descend, o sweet Hyperion,
Glide down upon a ray
Into my home and thoughts anon,
And brighten up my way."

When, from above, he heard the girl,
The evening-star shone dead,
The skies began to reel and whirl
Where used to be his stead;

With crimson torches in the air
The world's far ends are rife,
And from the valleys of nowhere
A proud shape comes to life;

And on the locks of his black hair
The crown seems all ablaze;
He came and floated, one would swear,
As bathed in the sun's rays.

The marble arms from the black shroud
Reach out as for embrace,
He comes so pensive, sad and proud,
And wax-pale is his face;

But his large eyes, of eerie spell,
Chimerically spark,
Two passions bottomless and fell
And overfull of dark.

"Twas hard to leave my sphere and come
And lend to you my ear,
The night, she is my mother glum,
The sun, my father dear.

O, come my treasure! Leave afar
The world where you abide;
My love, I am the evening star
And you shall be my bride.

O, come, and on your fair-haired head
A wreath of stars I'll lay,
That from my heavens you may shed
More glorious light than they."

"You are as handsome as in sleep
Can but a daemon be;
Yet never shall I take and keep
The path you show to me.

My heartstrings ache when every eve
You vent your cruel desire,
Your eyes, so gloomy, make me grieve,
And scorching is their fire."

"How could I possibly descend?
You ought to realize
That my life here will have no end,
While yours just gleams and dies."

"I do not make of words a choice,
I know not how to start,
Though you speak clearly, with men's voice,
I fail to read your heart;

But if you really want that I
Should your belovèd be,
Descend on earth from there on high,
Be mortal just like me."

"My immortality you take
As ransom for a kiss;
Yet you must know how sore I ache,
How sore your love I miss;

I shall be born, whate'er betide,
In sin, take a new law;
Though to eternity I'm tied,
I shall be tied no more."

And off he goes... For a girl's love,
E'er faster does he wend,
Estranged from his abode above,
And lost for days on end.

*

At this time cunning Cătălin,
A boy brought up so fine
That at each sumptuous banquet scene
He fills the cups of wine,

A page who step by step does hold
The robe-trains of the queen,
A tramp born out of wedlock, bold,
With eyes unduly keen,

With cheeks like rosy flowers in bloom,
On tiptoe, oh the sinner!
He steals into the dim-lit room
To look at Cătălina.

My goodness! she is near her prime...
How lovely is the duck!
Well, Cătălin, now is the time
For you to try your luck.

So when she slid into a nook,
He clasped her unawares.
"What is it, Cătălin? Now look —
Go, mind your own affairs!"

"What is it?! Thinking stifles you,
And you call that great fun!
You'd better smile and give me, do,
A hearty kiss, just one."

"I don't know what you ask, or why —
Leave me in peace, be gone!
I'm deadly lovesick, and on high
Is he — Hyperion."

"You don't know?! Well, I can — I bet!
Show you, and piecemeal, too,
What is love — only do not fret,
And hold your peace, mind you.

As in the grove the fowler lays
His snare upon the tree,
When I reach out my arm sideways,
With both your arms clasp me;

Then, as I gaze into your eyes,
Don't move them to and fro,
And when I lift you up, just rise
On tiptoe and stand so;

And, also, when my face bends down,
Do hold your face supine,
A lifetime in your looks I'll drown
And you will melt in mine.

So that you love may fully know
And all its magic learn,
When, kissing you, I bend full low,
Do kiss me in your turn."

She listened listless to the boy,
Though struck by his strange tone;
She was now passionate, now coy,
Now hostile, now half-prone.

She quoth, "I knew you from a child,"
In a low voice she quoth,
"A mouthy ne'er-do-well, and wild,
We'd get on smoothly both.

A star, however, born to freeze
In bleak oblivion's quiet,
Lends scope unbounded to the sea's
Vast solitude and riot;

My lashes secretly I bend
For I can't choose but cry
When the sea's foamy billows tend
Towards his seat on high.

To soothe my grief he shines so bright,
With love that can't be told,
But he attains e'er greater height,
E'er farther for my hold.

He sadly comes with his cold ray
From his own world, earth-proof,
For aye I'll love him and for aye
He will remain aloof.

And that is why my days are dry
As is a desert land,
So hallowed, yet, the nights that I
Their charm can't understand."

"You're just a girl, that's what you are...
Let's travel far and wide,
They'll lose our traces near and far
And think that we have died.

We shall be wise and gay, we'll roam
Sound both in mind and limb,
You will forget your parents' home,
And all star-prompted whim."

*

Off went the star. And as he went,
His wings grew more and more
And myriads of years were spent
For every hour that wore.

There was a sky of stars beneath,
A sky of stars o'erhead —
Like to a bolt with ne'er a death
Among the worlds he sped.

And from the valleys of the pit
He upwards spun his way ;
He saw how lights sprang up and lit
As on the earliest day.

How like a sea they girdled him,
And swam and heaved about...
And flew and flew, an ache-borne whim,
Till everything died out ;

For where he reached there was no bourne,
To see there was no eye,
And from the chaos to be born
Time vainly made a try.

And there was nothing. There was, though,
A thirst that did oppress,
A gaping gulf above, below,
Like blind forgetfulness.

"From heavy, dark eternity
Deliver me, o Lord,
For ever hallowed may'st Thou be
And praised throughout the world!

O, ask me, Father, anything
But change my fortune now;
O'er Fount of Life Thou art the king,
The death-dispenser Thou;

My aura of eternity,
My fiery looks, retrieve,
And, in exchange, for love grant me
A single hour's leave.

From chaos come, I would return
To chaos, oh, most Blessed,
For out of rest eternal born,
I yearn again for rest."

"Wan star, which from the world's confines
Dost with the cosmos rise,
Ask not for miracles and signs
That have no name nor guise!

What, wouldst thou deem thyself to be
A fellow of those men?
If all of them drowned in the sea,
Men would be born again.

For it is men alone, who, blind,
Build castles in the air;
When waves have found their grave, behind
Waves simmer everywhere;

Or lucky stars or Fate's disgrace
Are only humans' lot,
While we have neither time nor place
And death can strike us not.

From yesterday's eternal womb
Lives now whatever dies ;
And if a sun should meet its doom,
New suns would mount the skies.

Although they seem e'er to ascend,
Death pricks them with his thorn,
All that are born die in the end
To live on a new morn.

Hyperion, thou must remain
Wherever thou dost rise...
Wouldst thou hear my first word again
And so become more wise ?

Wilt thou that I my mouth should ope
To sing the song that wiles
The mountains with their wooded slope,
The sea's uncounted isles ?

Or wilt thou prove by deeds thy worth,
That right and might canst helm ?
I would in clods give thee the earth
To make it a great realm !

Or give thee vessels, masts on masts,
And hosts that land and sea
Will cross, the power to ride the blast,
But death — that cannot be...

And who, think'st thou, thy death is worth?
Turn back, turn down once more
And see what on the straying earth
There is for thee in store."

*

Hyperion finds back his way
To his predestined stead
And, once again, as yesterday,
His radiant light does shed.

The sun does with the dusk compete,
The night will gather soon;
Out of the waters, trembling, sweet,
Uprises the full moon

To gild with sparkles the soft breeze,
The paths in grass unmown.
Under a clump of linden-trees
A young pair sat alone:

"O, rest my head upon your breast!
There, sweetheart, let it lie,
Under the heaven's eye, more blest,
More sweet with every sigh;

Imbue my thoughts for evermore
With your light's frozen balm,
Upon my night of passion pour
Your everlasting calm.

Abide o'er me and from above
Assuage with your pale beam
My grief, for you are my first love
And, also, my last dream."

Hyperion, in heavens, read
Amaze upon their face ;
No sooner had he clasped her head
Than she did him embrace...

Two children with long flaxen hair
Are lying 'mid the flowers ;
Upon them blooms fall from the air
In scented, silver showers.

Love-struck, she raises up her eyes
And sees the star. Afire.
She trusts him in a gentle wise
With her unquenched desire :

"Descend, o mild Hyperion,
Glide down upon a ray
Into the woods and thoughts anon,
Light up my fortune's way !"

He trembles as he often would
In forests, hills and leas,
And guides the awesome solitude
Of ever restless seas.

Yet he no more, as yesterday,
Falls down into the sea ;
"What dost thou care, o, shape of clay,
If it is I or he ?

You live accompanied by weal
In your all-narrow fold,
Whilst in my boundless world I feel
Both deathless and dead cold."

Translated by *Leon Levițchi*

WHENEVER...

(Și dacă..., 1883)

Whenever branches tap the pane
And poplars quivering sigh,
It brings forth thoughts of you again
And slowly draws you nigh.

Whenever stars shine on the lake
Its depths illuminating,
It brings comfort to my heartache,
My mind begins unclouding.

Whenever thick clouds clear away
So the moon is glowing through,
It brings to mind from faraway
My incessant thoughts of you.

Translated by *Kurt W. Treptow*

WHERE POPLARS SOLITARY GROW...

(Pe lîngă plopii fără soț, 1883)

Where poplars solitary grow
I passed so oft alone,
And all thy neighbours knew me well,
By thee I was not known.

Beneath thy shining window oft
Up looking did I stand,
A whole world round thee understood,
Thou didst not understand.

How often did I wait to hear
From thee a whispered word,
How happy should I then have been,
Had I thy voice but heard.

O but an hour of love with thee,
An hour to be thy friend,
To hear thy whisp'ring accents sweet,
And then this life to end.

If from thine eye serene had come
To me a ray of love,
Then for all future times would shine
A new star's light above.

Thou wouldst have lived for ages long,
For ever in my rhyme,
And thou wouldst shine, with marble arms,
As beauty's mould sublime.

And thou wouldst be for aye adored,
So beauteous, with no peer,
Like fairies from the times of yore,
That in our dreams appear.

I loved thee with a heathen's eyes,
With painful passion hot,
That from my father's fathers came
To be my earthly lot.

But seldom do I pass today,
Mine eyes no longer burn,
Nor do I care if sadly thou
For me thy head dost turn.

For in thy gesture, gait, today
Thou art like all, and I
Indifferently look at thee
With dead man's sightless eye.

O if thy soul had then been filled
With sacred ecstasy,
Thou wouldst have lit on earth love's lamp
To burn eternally.

Translated by *Petre Grimm*

DOINA

(Doina, 1883)

EDITOR'S NOTE : Doina, written in 1883, is one of Eminescu's most explicit nationalistic poems. In it he bemoans the foreign oppression, referring especially to the Russians and the Hungarians, of the Romanian people. Because of its anti-Russian, nationalist character the poem was not allowed to be published for many years under the communist regime in Romania. In it, Eminescu calls on Ştefan cel Mare, the famous prince of Moldavia who defended his country against the Turks, Hungarians, Poles, and Tartars in the 15th century, to rise again from his grave in the Putna Monastery in northern Moldavia, to defend his people against foreign oppression. Eminescu intended this poem for the inauguration of a statue dedicated to this renowned prince in Iaşi in 1883.

* * *

From Tisa to Dniester's tide
All Romanians to me cried,
That they could no longer dwell
Amidst the foreign swell.
From Hotin until the sea
Rides Muscovite cavalry,
On the way they're always seen
From the seashore to Hotin.
And from Dorna to Boian
Plague is spreading on and on.
The foreigner is everywhere
Like you were no longer there ;
Up to mountains, down to valley
Enemies on horses rally,
From the seashore to Hotin,
They as flooding waters are.
Oh, the poor Romanians all
Like the crab they backwards crawl ;
A cruel fate to them begotten
Autumn is no longer autumn,
No more summer in their hand,
Now all strangers in their land.
From Dorohoi to Turnu
Enemies in steady strew
All, together, overcome you,

As they arrive by railway
All our songs they drive away,
All the birds fly out of sight
From the wretched foreign plight.
Over shadows of a thorn
Are the poor Christians born,
Ravaged is the country's face
Forests — our refuge place
Bending, their axe abide,
Even pure springs are dried,
Poor in poor countryside.

He who loves the foes about
May his heart the dogs rip out,
May desert his home efface,
May his sons live in disgrace!

Rise, O' Stephen, mighty Prince,
From sacred Putna come hence,
Let the holy Prelacy
Guard alone the monastery,
Let the saints and their deeds
In the trust of pious priests,
Let them ring the bell with might
All the day and all the night,
And may mercy grant thee Lord
Redeem thy people from the horde.
Rise, O' Stephen, from the ground
So I may hear your horn sound
And gather all Moldavia 'round.
If you blow your horn one blare
All Moldavia will be there,
If you sound a second time
All the woods will fall in line,
If your horn is blown again
All the enemies will be slain
And our borders we regain,
That the crows may hear their cry
Above gallow trees so high.

Translated by *Kurt W. Treptow*
and *Irina Andone*

I HAVE YET ONE DESIRE

(Mai am un singur dor, 1883)

I have yet one desire :
    In the silence of the night,
Allow me to expire
    Within the sea's sight ;
To have a peaceful sleep
    With the forest near,
    Above, a sky so clear
Over calm waters, deep.
    I need no funeral rite,
I want no coffin rich,
A bed for me just stitch,
    With branches young bind tight.

And let no one bemoan,
    Shed tears on my behalf,
Let autumn stir alone
    The withered leaves, its chaff.
While the spring loudly streams,
    Flows on incessantly,
    May the moon glide gently
Through high tops of evergreens.
    May the bell's echo sow
Through the cold wind of the night,
Let above me, from its height,
    The holy lime shed its bough.

As I will from then be
    A wanderer no more,
Memories, tenderly,
    Will cover me with yore.
Morning stars that ascend
    From the evergreen's hue
    Will smile at me anew,
As each remains my friend.

The sea will refrain crude,
Moan with ardor, robust,
But I will then be dust,
In peaceful solitude.

Translated by *Kurt W. Treptow*
and *Irina Andone*

PART III

SELECTED PROSE OF MIHAI EMINESCU

Translated by Ana Cartianu

PRINCE CHARMING, THE TEAR-BEGOTTEN

In the olden times when men and women as we now behold them were yet in the womb of time and the Lord's holy feet were still trodding the stony expanses of the earth — in those old days there was an emperor, as gloomy and woeful as midnight; and he had an empress as young and bright as noonday.

Fifty years had gone by since the emperor was waging war against a neighbor. The neighbor was dead leaving the hatred and the family feud as an inheritance to sons and grandsons. Fifty long years the emperor alone lived on, lonesome like the aged lion, his strength sapped by wars and worry; he had never laughed, not in his lifetime, nor even grinned at the innocent song of a child, at his young wife's tender smile, or the ancient yarns and jokes of warriors grown grey in battle and hardship. He felt weak and thought he was dying, and there was no heir to his throne. Mournful would he rise from the bed he shared with his young wife — a bed of gold, yet barren and unblessed — mournfully would he go to war ever sorrowful at heart; left behind, the empress bemoaned her loneliness with bitter tears. Her hair, as yellow as purest gold, fell upon her white round breasts, while from her big blue eyes pearl after watery pearl streamed down her cheeks whiter than silver lilies. Deep blue shadows appeared around her eyes and blue veins showed upon her face which was as white as marble.

She rose from her bed and threw herself prostrate upon the stone steps of a vault in the wall; here, above a smoky icon-lamp the silver-wrought icon of the Mother of Sorrows kept her vigil. Touched by the prayers of the kneeling empress, the eyelids of the cold icon moistened, and a single tear streamed from the dark eye of our Lord's mother. The empress rose to her full imposing height, touched the cold tear with her dry lips and sucked it deep down into her innermost soul. That very moment she became heavy with child.

One month went by, two months, nine months, and the empress gave birth to a son, as white as unskimmed milk, and as fair-haired as moonlight.

The emperor smiled, the sun, too, smiled in its sultry empire, and even stopped its course, so that for three days there was no night, but only fair weather and gladness. The wine flowed from unstopped casks and the shouting and merry-making rose sky-high.

His mother named him Prince Charming, the Tear-Begotten. He grew up as tall and straight as mountain fir, his body gained within a month as much as another within a year.

When he was old enough, he had an iron club made, hurled it up to the skies, caught it upon his little finger and the club broke in two. So he had a heavier one made, hurled it upwards as high as the cloud castles in the moon; this time, when it returned to earth the club did not break against the young man's finger. So the Prince took leave of his parents bent upon fighting the army of his father's enemy by himself. His noble body he clad in shepherd's garb, with a silk shirt soaked in his mother's tears, and a fine hat upon his head, decorated with flowers, gaudy with ribbons and beads from the necklaces of princely maidens; he stuck into his girdle belt a shepherd's pipe for a sorrowful song, the *doina*, and another one for dance music, the *hora*; and as the sun was two furlongs high in the sky, he set out into the wide world, his manly pride and strength full upon him.

On the road he played for joy and sorrow and would throw his club to rift the clouds so that it dropped one day's walk ahead. Mountains and valleys listened in dumb amazement, the waters quickened their tide to listen, wells would boil deeper into the earth and bubble up that every crest and drop might hear, that they might sing like him when whispering to lowlands and flowers.

The rivers gurgling under lonely stone heights picked up love songs from the noble shepherd; the eagles silently perching upon dry rocky peaks picked up the mournful shriek of sobbing sorrow. All things stood still and wondered as the young kingly shepherd passed by, piping for sorrow and joy. Tears of passionate yearning filled the dark eyes of maidens; the yearning for manly deeds would stir in the breasts of young shepherds, as they leaned against the rocks and upon their clubs.

All things stood still. The Prince alone never stopped, his music keeping time with his heart's desire, his eyes intent upon his club flashing like a steel eagle, like a shooting star

across the clouds, towards the heavens. On the late afternoon of the third day, as it fell, the club crashed fearfully against a copper gate. The gate was smashed and the young man entered. The moon had risen behind the mountains and was mirrored in a large clear lake, as clear as a cloudless sky. So clear was it that you could see the golden sand at the bottom. In the middle of the lake stood an emerald island, overgrown with green leafy trees; a fine castle rose among the trees, built of gleaming white marble, so smooth that woodland and pastures, lake and shores were reflected in the marble walls as in a silver mirror. A gilded barge lay afloat on the clear waters by the gate. Noble serene songs came from the palace floating in the pure evening air. The Prince stepped into the barge and rowed to the marble steps of the castle. Going inside he saw huge chandeliers with hundreds of branches in the vaulted roof of the stairs, a fiery star burning in each branch. He walked into the hall. The hall was lofty, the roof supported by pillars and arches of gold. A stately table stood in the middle covered with a white cloth, laid with plates carved out of a single large pearl. The lords in golden attire sitting round that table upon chairs of red velvet, were as handsome as in the days of their youth and as happy as the songs of joy. One in particular, his head adorned by gold studded with diamonds, his body clad in splendid attire, was as handsome as the moon on a summer night. Yet the Prince was even more handsome.

"Welcome, fair Prince!" the Emperor said; "I have heard of you, but never seen you."

"Good day, Your Highness, although I fear that it won't go well for you; I have come to fight you since you have long been plotting against my father."

"I have not plotted against your father, but always fought an honorable fight. But you I will not fight. Let us instead ask the fiddlers to play and the cup-bearers to fill the cups and let us be sworn brothers as long as we live."

So these sons of noble blood embraced, the lords wishing them well, and they drank the wine and talked things over.

The Emperor asked the Prince:

"Who is it that you fear most in the world?"

"No one, except God. What about you?"

"None except God and the forest hag, an old hideous witch who walks my lands bringing whirlwind and disaster

upon the empire. The face of the land turns barren, the villages disperse, and the towns fall into ruin wherever she goes. I summoned my hosts and fought her but I achieved nothing. She would have destroyed my whole kingdom so I was forced to bargain with her, agreeing to deliver every tenth child of my subjects as a tribute. She'll be here today to fetch her due."

As midnight struck, the faces of the guests fell. The crazy witch came howling through the foul air, astride upon the midnight, with gusty wings spread out, her face corroded like some porous rock corroded by water, a forest standing upon her head in lieu of hair. Her eyes were two murky nights, her mouth was a gaping chasm, her teeth, long rows of millstones. Roaring she came ; the Prince seized her by the waist and flung her into a large stone fulling-mill, as deep as he possibly could ; he rolled a piece of rock on top of it, fixing it on all sides with seven iron chains. Shackled, the hag blew and strained like the winds of the heavens confined, but to no avail.

The Prince went back to the banquet. Suddenly, through the arches, in the moonlight, they saw two large waves. What was it ? Unable to tear herself free, the forest-hag was riding over the waters, fulling-mill and all, dividing the surface of the waters into two ridges. She never stopped running, a very devil of a rock, crashing her way through the forests, marking the ground with a long trail until she vanished in the deep of night.

The Prince ate his meal, then shouldering his club, followed the trail of the fulling-mill until he came to a white pleasant-looking house shining in the moonlight, in a flower garden. The flower-beds were green and the flowers gleamed blue, dark-red, and white ; light butterflies, shimmering like golden stars, swarmed among them. The house and garden were bathed in scent and in soft, sweet, endless music by the swarming butterflies and bees. Two large water-tanks stood by the porch and on the porch a lovely girl sat spinning.

Her long white dress looked like a cloud of light and shadow, her golden hair was plaited and hung down her back, a wreath of lilies-of-the-valley sat upon her smooth head. In the moonlight she seemed to float in a golden aura.

With waxy fingers she spun a silver-white bundle of wool from a golden distaff, making it into a thin, white, gleaming thread, more like a throbbing moonray than like actual spun yarn.

At the sound of the Prince's light steps, the girl raised her blue eyes, as blue as the waters of a lake.

"Welcome, fair Prince," she said, her clear eyes half-closed. "It's been a long time since I dreamed of you... As my fingers spun the yarn so my thoughts spun a dream, a lovely dream in which we two loved each other. I was spinning a silver tuft, my Prince, and was going to weave a garment for you to wear and me to love. The work of my hands to clothe you, the days of my life to bless you with lifelong tenderness."

As she looked up appealingly, she dropped the spindle and the distaff fell to the ground. She rose and feeling shy at what she had just said, she stood there, her arms limp, her eyes cast down, like a guilty child.

He stepped up, put one hand around her waist while with the other he gently stroked her hair and brow, whispering :

"How lovely and how dear to me ! Whose daughter are you, my love ?"

"The forest-hag's," she answered with a sigh ; "will you love me now that you know whose daughter I am ?" She put both her bare arms around his neck and gazed long into his eyes.

"What do I care whose daughter you are," he said, "all that's important is that I love you."

"If you love me, let's run away together," she said, clinging still closer ; "were my mother to find you, she'd kill you and if you were to die I would go out of my mind or die too."

"Don't worry," he said, smiling and disengaging himself. "Where is your mother ?"

"She's been fretting and struggling in that fulling-mill you've locked her in, and gnawing at the chains that bind her ever since she's been back."

"Much good it will do her," he said rushing to see where she was.

"My Prince," the girl said, while two large tears shone in her eyes, "don't go yet. I'll show you what we'll have to

do so that you will get the better of my mother. Look at these two tanks here. One holds water and the other strength. Let's move them around. In fighting her enemies mother shouts as she grows tired : 'Stop and let us have a drink of water'. So she drinks strength while her enemy drinks pure water. That's why we will move them around ; she won't know and she'll drink plain water during her struggle with you."

No sooner said than done.

Then, he dashed behind the house.

"Hello, old witch," he shouted.

The old hag wrenched herself free from the fulling-mill making the chains snap, rising long and lean into the clouds.

"Now, a good thing you're here, my princeling," she said shrinking back to her usual size. "Come now, let's wrestle and we'll see who's the toughest."

"Right you are," the Prince said.

The witch caught him around the waist, stretched up as far as the clouds, then flung him to the ground, so that he stuck in ankle-deep.

The Prince flung her down and stuck her in knee-deep.

"Stop and let's have a drink of water," said the forest-hag feeling tired.

They stopped for breath. The witch drank water, the Prince drank strength ; forthwith a kind of live fire ran like thrills and shivers through his tired muscles and veins.

With twice his usual strength he caught the old hag around the waist in an iron embrace and stuck her into the ground up to her neck. Then banged her head with his club and blew her brains out. The sky turned grey and cloudy and a cold wind began to moan and shook the small house in every joint. Red serpents of light tore at the black edge of the clouds, the waters seemed to howl, the thunder alone resounded a strong incantation, as if prophesying destruction. In the thick, impenetrable darkness, the Prince could see a phantom gleaming silvery white, wandering with loose, golden hair, arms raised in panic.

He went up to her and took her in his arms ; she sank, more dead than alive, upon his chest, nestling her cold hands inside his bosom. He kissed her eyelids to bring her around. The clouds were chasing each other in the sky and a feverish moon showed here and there through the clearings. The

Prince could see two blue stars opening upon his breast — his bride's eyes. He picked her up and started running through the storm. She nestled her head on his chest and seemed to be asleep. Having almost reached the Emperor's garden, he laid her in the barge carrying her across the lake as if in a cradle; he plucked grasses, scented hay, and flowers from the garden, made up a bed and placed her in it as if in a nest.

The sun rising in the east looked tenderly upon them. Her clothes, soaked by the rain, clung to her sweet rounded limbs; her face, pallid and wet, looked like white wax; her small hands crossed upon her breast, her loose hair spread out on the hay, the large eyes closed and deep-set, all looked beautiful, but the maiden seemed dead. The Prince strewed a few blue flowers upon that smooth white brow, then sat himself down beside her and began softly piping. The clear sky, boundless as the sea, the sun, a fiery face, the humid smell of the reviving flowers caused her to sleep a long peaceful sleep; the course of her dreams kept pace with the weeping voice of the flute. The sun was at the zenith, nature was breathless. The Prince was listening to her peaceful breathing, warm and moist. He gently leaned over her and kissed her cheek. Then she opened her eyes still full of dreams, and sleepily stretching out, she murmured smiling:

"So you are here?"

"No, I'm not, can't you see I'm not?" he said with tears of joy.

As he sat by her she put out her arm and placed it around his waist.

"Come, get up," he said, fondling her. "It's broad daylight."

She got up, pushed her hair back from her brow and down her back; he put his arm around her waist, she put hers around his neck and thus they walked among the flower-beds and entered the Emperor's marble palace.

He took her and showed her to the Emperor, telling him she was his bride. The Emperor smiled, then took the Prince's hand as if wishing to impart some secret. He led him to a tall window looking out over a broad lake. He said nothing, but just gazed helplessly upon the smooth waters and his eyes filled with tears. A swan had raised its wings like silver sails, and, ducking its head in the waves, was rippling the lake's still surface.

"Tears, Your Highness?" the Prince said. "What for?"

"Brave Prince," the Emperor said, "you have done me such a great deed which I could only repay you with my eyesight, no matter how precious that is to me. Yet can I ask even more of you."

"What is that, Your Highness?"

"Look at that swan, how she loves the water. I am young, so I too, should be in love with life, yet so many times I was about to kill myself... I love a beautiful girl, with thoughtful eyes as sweet as the dreaming sea. She is the daughter of Genario, a proud, wild man, who spends his time hunting in primeval forests. He is as hard-hearted as the girl is beautiful. Every attempt at kidnapping her was in vain. Won't you have a try?"

The Prince would rather have stayed, but sworn brotherhood was sacred to him, as to any young warrior, dearer than life, dearer than his own bride.

"Most high Emperor, of all the fair chances you've had one is greater than all: having Prince Charming as your sworn brother. Come, I'll go kidnap Genario's daughter."

He provided himself with swift horses, steeds with soaring hearts and was about to leave. His bride, Ileana was her name, gave him a sweet kiss and whispered in his ear:

"Never forget, my lord, that while you're gone I will be forever weeping."

He looked at her tenderly, fondled her, but tore himself away from her embraces, jumped into the saddle and rode off into the wide world.

He crossed lonely forests and snow-capped mountains. The moon would occasionally come up from behind ancient rocks, somewhat pale, like the face of a dead maiden; he would then imagine a gigantic rag hanging from the sky, throwing its tattered hem over some mountain top, a haunted night, a decayed vanished past, a castle in ruins, just stones and broken walls. Day broke at last. The Prince saw that the mountain range opened upon a wide green sea, alive with thousands of glimmering waves, gently and musically crossing the expanse of the sea, away into the distance of blue sky and green waters.

At the extreme end of that mountain range, a grand rock descending sheer into sea was mirrored in the waters. A stately castle stood like a white nest upon it, shining silver-

white. Encased in the arches of the walls were tall windows; one window was open and among the flower pots you could see a girl's face, dark and dreamy like a summer night. It was Genario's daughter.

"Welcome, Prince Charming," she said, jumping and opening the gates of that stately castle where she dwelt alone, like a genius in the desert. "Last night I thought I was talking to a star and the star told me that you're coming on behalf of the Emperor who loves me."

In the great hall of the castle, in the ashes of the fireplace, a seven-headed Tomcat was watching. If one head bellowed, it was heard one-day's distance away and if all seven did, you could hear the bellowing seven days away.

Engrossed in his savage hunting, Genario was one day's distance away.

The Prince picked the girl up in his arms placing her on his horse and they both flew along the sands by the sea, like two hardly perceptible creatures of the air. But Genario, tall and strong, had a magic horse with two hearts in his chest.

The Tomcat in the castle caterwauled, one head this time; Genario's horse gave a strong deep snort.

"What is it?" Genario asked his horse. "Too much of a good thing, hey?"

"It's nothing to do with me, it's trouble for you. Prince Charming has stolen your daughter."

"If we make haste, will we be able to reach them?"

"No great haste, for we can catch up with them." Genario mounted and flew like an old terror to catch the fugitives. He soon overtook them. The Prince could not fight him because Genario was a Christian, so his strength came not from the powers of darkness, but from God.

"Prince Charming," Genario said, "you're very handsome indeed and I am sorry for you. This once I'll spare you, but if you try again... Mind what you are about."

And placing the girl by his side, he vanished upon the wind as if he'd never been.

The Prince, however, was undaunted and knew the way back. He went once again and found the girl alone; her face paler and tear-stained, but she looked even more beautiful.

Genario was out hunting, two days' ride away. The Prince picked out fresh horses from Genario's own stables.

This time they left by night. They glided like moonrays over the deep seawaves, they hurried through the cold, dreary night, like two delightful dreams. As they ran they could hear the long-drawn-out double-throated meowing of the Tomcat in the fireplace at home. Suddenly they seemed unable to move, as in a dream when you're wanting to run and cannot. A clolud of dust then descended upon them as Genario was coming at top speed. His face looked terrible, his eyes were cruel. Without another word, he seized the Prince and flung him into the black stormy clouds of heaven. Then vanished, maiden and all.

Consumed by lightning, the Prince dropped, a handful of ashes, upon the barren fiery sand of the desert. But his ashes turned into a spring of fresh water that trickled upon the sands, bordered with tall lush green trees, shedding a cool, scented shade.

Had you understood the brook's murmur you would have realized that it was pining, in low mournful song, for Ileana, the Prince's fairhaired bride. But who was to understand the brook's voice in the heart of a desert, so far untrodden by the foot of man?

But in those days, the Lord God still walked the earth. One day, two men could be seen walking through the desert. One had a luminous face and clothes respiendent like the sun's white light; the other looked more humble, like the shadow of the shining one. They were the Lord and St. Peter. Scorched by the desert's sands, they bathed their feet in the clear cool streamlet that flowed from the spring. They walked upstream, their ankles sunk in the waves up to the shady spring, where the Lord drank of the water, washing his luminous face and his wonder-working hands. Then they both sat down in the shade, the Lord thinking of his Heavenly Father, Saint Peter listening to the dirge of the weeping brook. As they rose to go, Saint Peter said:

"Let this brook turn into what it used to be, Oh Lord."

"Amen," the Lord said raising his hand, after which they made for the sea without looking back.

The brook and the trees vanished, as if by magic. Prince Charming, waking as if from deep sleep, looked around.

He then saw the Lord's luminous face as he trod the waters of the sea, the waves lying low before him as if he were walking on dry land; he saw Saint Peter too, who,

unable to resist his human nature, kept looking back and nodding his head to Prince Charming. The Prince never lost sight of them until Saint Peter's figure vanished in the distance and you could only see the Lord's bright face shedding a streak of light upon the shining waters, so that, had it not been noontide, you might have thought the sun was setting. The Prince grasped the full meaning of his wondrous resurrection and fell upon his knees facing the setting of that Godly sun.

But then he remembered having promised to steal Genario's daughter, and a warrior's promise is seldom left unfulfilled. So he set out and as night was falling he reached Genario's castle that glimmered in the darkness like a giant phantom. He went inside...

Genario's daughter was weeping. But, on seeing him, her face brightened as a wave brightens beneath the sunlight. He told her how he had come to life; then she said: "You won't be able to kidnap me, unless you have a horse such as my father's, for that horse has two hearts inside of it. I will ask father tonight where he got his horse, so that you too can get one like it. Meanwhile, I'll turn you into a flower so that my father won't find you." He sat upon a chair, she whispered some sweet charm and as soon as she kissed his brow, he turned into a red flower, as dark-red as a ripe wild-cherry. She placed it in the window among her flowers and sang for joy so that the castle echoed.

Just then Genario came in.

"Cheerful, my child? Why should you be so cheerful?" he asked.

"Because there is no Prince Charming to steal me," she answered, laughing.

They sat down to dinner.

"Father," the girl said, "who gave you the horse that you ride when you go out hunting?"

"What is that to you?" he said, frowning.

"I just want to know, that's all, you can be sure," the girl answered, "since there's no prince to steal me."

"You know I never go against your wishes," Genario said. "Far away, by the seashore, dwells an old woman who has seven mares. She hires men to watch over them, by the year, though the year with her lasts only three days; if a man is good at his job, she lets him choose a colt for his

pay; if not, she kills him and hoists his head upon a pole. But even if a man keeps good watch she'll still cheat him, for she takes the hearts out of all the horses and crams them into a single one, so that the man will more often than not choose a heartless horse which is worse than an ordinary one... Are you satisfied, my child?"

"Quite," she answered, smiling. Upon which Genario flung a light, red, scented handkerchief in her face. The girl stared long into her father's eyes, like one waking from a dream that she could no longer remember. She had quite forgotten the things her father had told her. But the flower in the window was spying through its leaves like a red star through the creases of a cloud.

The following day at dawn Genario again went out hunting.

The girl murmured a charm and kissed the red flower so that the Prince stood before her, born of thin air.

"Well, did you find out?" he asked.

"Not a thing," she said sadly, placing the back of her hand upon her brow. "I have forgotten everything."

"But I remember everything," he said. "Farewell, my pretty; we will soon meet again." He mounted a horse and vanished in the desert.

In the sultry heat of day, on the outskirts of the forest, he saw a mosquito writhing in the hot sand.

"Fair Prince," the mosquito said, "pick me up and take me into the forest, and you won't be sorry. I am the Emperor of the mosquitoes." The Prince carried him into the woods that lay ahead of him.

As he came out of the woods he again crossed a desert along the seashore and saw a crab so sunburnt that it was unable to crawl back into the sea...

"Fair Prince," the crab said, "do fling me into the sea, and I'll help you how I can. I am the Emperor of crabs."

The Prince flung him into the sea and went on his way. Behold, as night was falling, he came to an ugly mud hut covered with horse dung. There was no paling round it, but just long sharp pikes, six of which topped by a skull, the seventh rocking to and fro in the wind, saying: skull! skull! skull!

In the porch an old dried-up hag lay upon an old sheepskin coat, her grey head in the lap of a young and beautiful servant girl who was rubbing her head.

"Good day," Prince Charming said.

"Welcome, young man," the old woman answered getting up. "What are you doing here? What are you looking for? Maybe you'll take my mares afield grazing?"

"I will."

"My mares will only graze at night, so you can drive them out this very minute... Hey, you, my girl, just give this young man the food I prepared for him and set him on his way."

Close to the mud hut there was a cellar underground. He entered and saw seven black mares with shining coats, as black as seven nights they were and had never yet seen the sunlight. They were snorting and pawing the ground.

Having taken no food that day he ate what the old woman provided, then mounting one of the mares, he drove the others into the cool dark air of the night. But he felt a heavy sleep gradually creeping through his veins, his eyes grew dim and he fell as if dead upon the grassy meadow. When he woke up day was dawning. The mares were gone. He could see his head already stuck upon a pike, when behold! the seven mares came out from a distant forest, driven by an endless swarm of mosquitoes, while a thin voice was piping:

"You've done me a good turn. One good turn deserves another."

As he drove the horses back, the old woman began to rave, to turn the house upside down, and to beat the girl who was in no way to blame.

"What is the trouble, mother?" the Prince asked.

"Nothing," she answered. "Just that I am out of humor. It's nothing to do with you... I am quite pleased." After this she entered the stables and began to whip the horses shouting:

"Look for better hiding places, curse you, so that he won't find you again, blast him for a foe and an enemy, may he writhe in the throes of death!"

On the following evening he set out with the horses again, but this time, too, he sank and slept until dawn. Deeply upset, he felt like going into the wide world when lo and behold! there came the seven mares, rising from the depths of the sea, all bitten by a host of crabs.

"One good turn deserves another," a voice piped. It was the Emperor of crabs.

The Prince drove the horses home and witnessed the same scene as on the previous day.

During the day, however, the old woman's servant came near and pressing his hand, she spoke in a low voice :

"I know you are Prince Charming. Don't eat of the food that the witch is preparing for you, because it's cooked with poppyseed... I'll cook other dishes for you." The girl secretly prepared victuals for him and at nightfall, when he was about to leave with the horses, his head was clear, as if by magic.

About midnight he returned, drove the horses into the stable, locked the door, and entered the house. A few embers were still glittering in the ashes of the grate. The old woman lay on her back on a chest, as stiff as dead. He thought she had passed away and shook her. She slept like a log and didn't move. So he woke the girl who was sleeping on top of the oven.

"There," he said, "the old hag is dead."

"Dead, this fright? No fear," she sighed. "True, she is now as dead as dead can be. It is the middle of the night. a heaviness possesses her body... but her soul, goodness only knows what crossroads it haunts, what numerous charms it works... Before the cock crows, she sucks the hearts of the dying or ravages the souls of the unfortunate. So, brother, your time is up tomorrow ; take me along with you and you won't be sorry. I'll save you from countless dangers that the hag is plotting against you."

She fetched a whetstone, a brush, and a handkerchief from the bottom of an old, battered chest.

The following morning the Prince's year of service was up. The old witch was bound to give him one of the horses and let him go his own way. As they were having their midday meal she went into the stable, plucked the hearts out of the seven horses and stuck them all into the body of a three-year old, as thin as a bag of bones. The Prince rose from the table, and prompted by the witch, went to choose the horse he was going to take. The horses that were emptied of their hearts had shining black coats, the three-year old possessed of hearts lay in a corner, upon a dung-heap.

"This one I'll have," the Prince said, pointing at the lean horse.

"Now, God forbid that your work should go unrewarded!" said the cunning old hag. "Why not take your due? Choose one of those fine horses. Which one you want, and you'll have it."

"Nay, this is the one I want," the Prince said, sticking to his choice.

The witch ground her teeth as if out of her mind, but soon closed that loose mouth of hers lest the gall boiling in her evil heart should gush out.

"All right then, take it!" she said at last.

He mounted the horse, his club upon his shoulder. The face of the desert seemed to follow upon his trail and he flew like thought, like a whirlwind amid the clouds of sand in his wake.

The runaway servant girl was waiting for him in a forest. He placed her on the horse behind him and never stopped racing. Night breathed upon the earth a cool, black breath.

"I feel a burn in my back," the girl said. The Prince turned to look. There was a greenish whirlwind on high, out of which two fiery red eyes shone fixedly, their flame-like gaze piercing the girl's entrails.

"Throw the brush," said the girl.

The Prince did so. And lo! behind them rose a large, thick, dark forest, alive with an endless stir of leaves and the howling of hungry wolves.

"Forward," the Prince shouted at the horse that shot through the dark night like a demon fleeing its cursed doom. A pale moon was gliding among grey clouds, like a clear face across troubled and meaningless dreams. Prince Charming flew and never stopped.

"I feel a burn in my back," the girl moaned heavily as if she'd repressed it for a long time. The Prince turned and saw a large, grey owl; its eyes alone shone like two lightning bolts from within a cloud.

"Hurl the whetstone," the girl said.

The Prince did so. Suddenly a grey peak sprang up, stunned, immovable, a horror-stricken stone giant, its head in the clouds.

The Prince whizzed through the air so fast he thought he wasn't galloping at all, but just tumbling from heaven into a bottomless pit.

"It's burning hot," the girl said.

The witch had worked a hole in the rock and was coming through it as a trail of smoke, a burning ember.

"Hurl the neckerchief," the girl said.

The Prince did so. Suddenly, a smooth expanse of water appeared behind them, clear and deep; the silver moon and fiery stars were mirrored in that fair glassy lake.

The Prince heard a long drawn-out charm floating in the air and searched the clouds. High up in the heavens Old Midnight was smoothly floating upon its copper wings in the blue distance, two hours before its time. The hag was struggling, as if out of her mind, already half-way across the silvery lake. Prince Charming hurled his club into the clouds and struck the wings of Midnight. It fell to the ground like lead, giving twelve pitiful cracks.

The moon hid behind a cloud while the hag, overcome with leaden sleep, sunk into the mysterious spellbound depth of the lake. A tuft of tall black grasses rose in the middle of the lake. It stood for the witch's doomed soul.

"We're through," the girl said.

"We're through," the seven-hearted horse echoed. "My Prince," he added, "you've struck down the Midnight two hours before her time and I can feel the sand writhing under my feet. The skeletons lying buried in the hot sand will rise and start to soar to the moon for their feasts. It is dangerous to be wandering about at this hour. The damp poisoned air of the dead specters might kill you. Better lie down; meanwhile I will go back and suck once more the white invigorating milk of my mother that I may turn fine-looking and sleek-coated again."

Prince Charming agreed. He dismounted and spread his coat upon the sand that was still hot.

But the girl's eyes were strangely sunken beneath her brow, the bones and joints of her face were showing, the dark skin had turned purple, her hand was heavy as lead and as cold as ice.

"What's wrong?" the Prince asked.

"Nothing, it's nothing," she said in a faint voice and lay in the sand shaking as if possessed.

The Prince let the horse loose, then lay upon the coat he had spread. He fell asleep, but thought he was awake. The lids of his eyes were red-hot and through the glare he thought the moon was slowly climbing down, growing ever larger as it did so, until it looked like a celestial, silvery city suspended between earth and sky, ablaze in its splendor... with tall,

white palaces, thousands of rose-colored windows; an imperial road was leading down to earth, covered with silver pebbles blown over with moonbeam dust.

Meanwhile the wide dreary deserts were teeming with tall skeletons... dry-bony skulls... clad in long thin robes, of loose silver tissue hardly covering the white dried-up bones.

They wore crowns upon their heads made of flashes of light and long gilded thorns... mounted upon skeleton horses they slowly climbed, quite slowly... in long procession... long rows of shifting silvery shadows. ...They went the way of the moon, disappearing into the lifeless palaces of that moony city through the windows of which came the strains of music, a music of dreams.

At this point he seemed to feel that the girl by his side was rising slowly... her flesh dissolved, only her bones were left; in a flowing silver robe she, too, was taking the luminous path leading to the moon. She was traveling back to the murky world of shadows whence, lured by the spells of the witch she had come down to earth.

Then the film upon his eyes turned green... dark, and all was blacked out.

As he opened his eyes the sun was high in the sky. The girl was missing. But in that arid country the horse was neighing, fine, resplendent, invigorated with the golden sunlight which he was now seeing for the first time.

The Prince vaulted into the saddle: time to think a few happy thoughts before he reached Genario's embattled castle. This time Genario was seven days' distance away, hunting.

He picked the girl up and sat her in front of him. She threw her arms round his neck and buried her head in his chest. Her long white robe brushed the sand as they flew. The speed was such that she thought it was the desert and the waves that were shooting past while they were standing still. And you could hear the Tomcat meowing, though very feebly, with all his seven heads.

Away in the woods Genario heard his horse neighing.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Prince Charming is stealing your daughter," the magic horse replied.

"Can we reach him?" asked Genario, taken aback, for he knew that he had killed the Prince.

"My word, we cannot," the horse replied, "because he's riding a brother of mine who's got seven hearts, while I have only two."

Genario drove his spurs into the horse's flanks : trying to shake itself free, it ran... like a whirlwind. Seeing the Prince across the desert, Genario said to his horse :

"Tell your brother to hurl him into the clouds, then come to me and he will feed on the kernel of nuts and drink fresh milk." Genario's horse shouted this to his brother and his brother repeated it to the Prince.

"Tell your brother," the Prince said, "to shoot his master into the clouds and I will feed him with live embers and give him fiery flame to drink."

The Prince's horse shouted this to his brother who shot Genario up into the clouds. The clouds in the heavens stood still with wonder and turned into a grey handsome castle. Two sky-blue eyes cast long lightning flashes from behind two banks of clouds. These were Genario's eyes, now exiled in the heavens.

The Prince slowed the pace of his own horse and sat the girl upon her father's steed. One more day and they would reach the Emperor's fine citadel.

Prince Charming was taken for dead, so, as the rumor of his home-coming spread, the light of day grew brighter and people murmured expectantly, just as a cornfield flutters at the breath of the wind.

What about princess Ileana meanwhile ?

As soon as her husband was gone she locked herself in a secluded garden, behind tall, iron walls ; she lay down upon the cold stones, propped her head against a boulder and wept tears, as clear as diamonds, into a golden tub nearby.

The garden had a number of flower-beds, all unwatered and untended. From the barren gravel, from the sultry heat of day and the drought of night sprang yellow-leaved flowers. Their color was dull and turgid like the troubled eyes of the dead ; they were the flowers of sorrow.

Blinded with weeping, the eyes of the princess were weak and she could hardly see ; in the mirror of her own tears she thought she could scan the face of her beloved bridegroom, as if in a dream. Her eyes, now dry of tears, had ceased weeping. The long yellow hair fell loose like the folds of a golden cape upon her cold breasts ; dumb sorrow was engraved

upon her features ; a stony mermaid, you would have thought, lying upon the gravel of a tomb. The sad, faded flowers turned pearly white ; watered in innocent tears they were called lilies-of-the-tears [1].

The pale, sightless princess slowly walked among the flower-beds and culled a heap of lilies-of-the-tears, in her lap; she then spread them near the golden tub, making a bed of flowers.

Prince Charming then appeared.

She fell upon his chest but, overcome with joy, she could only gaze at him with those sightless eyes that would take him in. She then took him by the hand and showed him the tubful of tears.

A clear moon, like a golden face, sat smiling upon the deep blue sky. The night air was cool. The Prince bathed his face in the tubful of tears, then wrapped himself in a cape of moonbeams that she had woven for him and lay down to sleep on the bed of flowers. The princess lay beside him and dreamt of the Holy Mother of God picking two violet stars in the morning sky and placing them upon her head.

In the morning, as she awoke, she could see.

On the third day the emperor wedded Genario's daughter.

The fourth day was to be the Prince's wedding day.

A shaft of sunrays from the sky taught the musicians the joyful songs that the angels sing on the consecration of a saint. Water gushing out of the entrails of the earth taught them the song of the weird sisters as they spin for mortals to dream of happy life. So the musicians produced joyous songs and heart-felt epithalamiums [2].

The red, scarlet rose, the silver lily, the pearly lilies-of-the-valley, the coy violet, and indeed all the flowers got together, each speaking in its own scent, debating at length as to the possible shades of the wedding dress. They told their secret to a dandy blue and gold butterfly. He bent and flew in circles above the bride's face as she slept and made her see as in a mirror the way she should be dressed. Dreaming that she was so beautiful, she smiled.

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[1] Lilies-of-the-valley : Rom. *lăcrimioare* = tiny tears.

[2] Epithalamium (Greek word) : a marriage song praising the bride and bridegroom.

The bridegroom put on a shirt of moonray spun yard, a pearly belt, and a snow-white cape.

And there was a lovely, handsome wedding as no other in the world.

And they lived in peace and quiet many happy years. And if the common saying be true, that time stands still for the magic princes of the world, then maybe they're still living.

(After a tale from the Bihor county, Northern Romania)

CAESARA

It was a summer morning. The sea spread out its endless blue expanse, the sun rose slowly in the deep blue serenity of the sky, the flowers woke refreshed after the long night's sleep, the rocks, black under the night's dew, were fuming and turning grey, here and there idling in the heat, they frittered into small sand and stone pieces.

Among stone crags, to the west, rose an old monastery enclosed by walls like a citadel; above the walls, in places you could see the green top of a poplar or chestnut tree. The steep roofs of moldy hollow tiles, the black dome of the church, the enclosing walls crumbling and overgrown by rich vegetation, by ants building tiny states, by long processions of red insects lazily idling in the sun, the century-old oak gate, the stone steps worn and corroded by walking, all these things together led you to the conclusion that here was a ruin kept up as an item of curiosity, rather than a place to live in.

On the right hand side of the monastery rose wooded hills, vegetable gardens, vineyards, tiny villages with white houses strewn along the bottom of the valleys; on the left hand side there was a road threading like a white ribbon through vast green fields vanishing into the distance; in front of it was the sea, some rocky crags from under the water piercing its surface in places.

Along the surrounding walls footpaths were climbing the hill-side, now and then impeded in their course by mole heaps. Along one of these paths you could see an old monk making for the gate of the monastery, his hands behind his back. His cassock was of rough woollen fabric, he was girt with white braid, part of his wooden rosary beads were hanging out of his bosom, his wooden sandals dragged and clattered at every step. His white beard was somewhat thin, his eyes like whey, expressionless and rather imbecile: there was no resignation or asceticism.

Having reached the gate, he pulled the bell, a novice opened and he entered the seemingly abandoned monastery yard: it was paved with square stones among which tall grasses grew abundantly, a pond in the middle, banks overgrown

with all sorts of wild weeds: large-leaved burdock, mullein, sweet melilot and the vetchling that weaves layers of flowers on top of the greenery strangling it in the knotty net of its twigs. A long, shady, cobwebbed corridor led to a staircase, then into the yard. The old man opened the entrance door and disappeared within the building.

If you looked at it from the garden you could see, in the long high wall of the monastery precincts, black-barred windows; a single one was overgrown with ivy and behind those meshes of dark leaves stood earthen pots planted with white roses, their heads pining for the sun. That window opened into a cell the walls of which were covered with all sorts of strange sketches in pencil: here the figure of a saint, there a dog romping on the grass, further on the well-drawn picture of a horned cockroach, flowers, bushes, women's heads, nightcaps, slippers, in short a whole book of sketches spread out on the walls. A bookcase with canonical books, a high-backed chair, clerical clothes hanging from a nail, a wooden chest painted with all kinds of flowers, a simple bed with a pair of slippers underneath, plus a black tomcat, such was the complete outfit. The sun's rays pierced the living and trembling net at the window filling the semiobscurity with shafts of light within which thousands of moving specks were all dancing, actuated by a sunray and bound to vanish with it.

A young monk was sitting in the chair. He was there in those moments of pleasant idleness that a large dog experiences when he stretches his muscles in the sun, lazy, drowsy, free of all desires. A high and equally large forehead, framed by shiny black hair rose over a pair of eyes sunken in their sockets and a delicate nose. A thin-lipped mouth, a well-rounded chin, eyes, so to speak, content with something like self-confidence which might easily become boldness; their expression was a strange mixture of dream and cold reason.

He went up to the window and looked down into the garden, at the tender grass growing in the virgin shade of the trees, at the oranges flashing yellow through the leaves, then took up a pencil and drew an orange on the wall. He picked up a slipper, placed it on the table and looked at it, then opened a clerical book and painted the slipper on the corner of a page. Such desecration of holy books! All the margins were full of women's profiles, clergymen, knights, beggars, clowns, to put it shortly, it was the reality of life daubed on every available corner.

The old man entered suddenly.

"Your blessing, father."

"Bless you !"

"I say, Hyeronimo," the old man was cheerful and sounded a bit cracked-up, "what are you working on now, you madcap ?"

"Working, did you say ? Have I ever been working ? Such a supposition is an insult to my character, father. I never do any work. I just play, drawing nonsense, rubbish. But as for work... I have more sense, though I may not show it."

"You're wrong not to study painting."

"I am neither wrong nor right, since I do nothing. I'm just playing."

"You're burying the coin, son, you're burying it."

"Burying the devil I am, father."

"Get thee behind me, Satan !" the old man said, hopping and falling into his arms.

Hyeronimo laughed.

"God only knows, father, how you manage to be in such good spirits. I have moments of sadness, whereas you... I don't think so."

"Sad, Hyeronimo ? I'll be damned if I was ever sad. Sadness avoids me as my chum avoids incense. But never mind, come into town with me. Today, looking in upon your abbot, I cut a surly, sulky mien, I said I needed your help for burial rituals, lying as usual ; to make a long story short, he concedes to you my honorable society of sextons. We'll go into town, I know a good place for wine, my word ! We'll play cards with other brethren, we'll smoke long pipes and get drunk as long as the day is long, and we'll gaze through the windows at the ladies ! No harm done, of course."

"Of course."

"I wonder who the dickens made you take the cloth, you rascally Hyeronimo ?"

"Who did ? The devil himself !"

We should be wrong in thinking that all these levities of the monks meant something. Their so-called infamy was just childlike nonsense in spite of the loose speech it was couched in. A glass of wine, a game of cards, a smoke, now and then a furtive look at a smiling maid's profile, such was always, in fact, their so-called licentiousness. The charm lay in the mystery that hypocritically wrapped their small worldly steps.

Hyeronimo flung his cassock away, put a sinister face, the old man cut quite a crazy one to impress the frightened porter and they both left the monastery precincts as fast as they could, only to temper the speed of their walk on the highroad that led to town.

II

"Countess, I will persuade your father to force you to be mine."

"No one may doubt that you can do it, no one that you are capable of doing it. My father owes you money and you want his daughter. Nothing could be more natural. You will agree about the price like the two honorable men that you are. But as long as I am not your wife, I have a right to ask you to desist. There will be time enough for you to torture me when I become your woman."

The lovely countess turned her back upon him and looked out of the window into the street. She began to laugh at the sight of an old monk doing his best to look pious in order to impress the passersby. Hyeronimo and Onufrey were standing in the street. Onufrey was fingering the rosary beads held in both hands crossed upon his belly. Hyeronimo stood with a demeanor deeply and nobly serious.

The marquis Castelmare gave a long fierce look to the maiden who despised his love, then left abruptly, slamming the door behind him.

"Good looks that monk has," the countess murmured smiling. "And what an old fool! He looks like a jester playing the part of an intriguer. Such noble features in that young man. He looks like a demon, handsome, serious, indifferent. As it happens, Francesco is looking for a model to sit for his demon in 'The Fall of the Angels'. If we could only get hold of the monk."

"Maestro," she shouted, drawing two chairs to the window.

An old man entered, dressed in a velvet blouse, his face noble and serene, his beard grey. He came up to the maiden, a question on his lips.

"Come along, sit beside me. Just look at that young monk. A fine demon in the 'Fall of the Angels', don't you think?"

"A fine Adonis in 'Venus and Adonis", the painter said with a smile, "you being Venus, he Adonis."

"Why, that's putting it rather strongly."

Francesco took her hand into his own and put his lips on her fine forehead.

"You're such a child," he said in a low voice, "and why not? You want love. Every string of your heart trembles at this word. Do you want a man whom you do not love, that man Castelmare, to take you as his wife? You know I am rich, you know I love you as if you were my own child. You know that your father would sell you, provided he gets the price he demands, because he's destitute, a rake, a gambler. You know that the only way to avoid misfortune is to run away from this house. You want a father? Here I am. You want a home? Mine is open to you. You want a lover, Caesara? There he is. I have been in love, too. I have known that sweet pain in my younger days. You are pining for it: yet would you be ready to give up the finest model for a painter: an angel of genius, for demons are angels of genius, the others who stayed behind in heaven are a bit dull."

"Why, father, you wouldn't have me run after him, would you?" she said, her face turning red.

"Do you want me to run after him?"

"Well, no."

"Well, yes. My compliments to you, young lady," Francesco said, hastening to the door. She would have stopped him, but it would have been of no use. Not stop him? It wouldn't do. She just did nothing, which was the wisest course in this case. The painter walked out smiling maliciously, yet particularly amused by Caesara's demeanor — contradictory, troubled, desperate.

She was left in perfect confusion. She gazed on Hyeronimo. How handsome he was. Her heart trembled within her. She could have killed him, had he been hers. She was quite mad.

The beauty, the plenitude, the graciousness of this woman! Her face had an amberlike whiteness just deepened by a slight bluish shade, due to that lucid, delicate venous system that ideal pictorial art concentrates in a protruding brow and in eyes as blue as a dark night shining in the shade of long lashes, thereby becoming softer, darker, more demonic. Her fair hair looked like a golden haze, her soft mouth somewhat fuller in the lower lip, seemed to ask for kisses, the nose was delicate, the sweet chin rounded as those of Giacomo Palma. Thus, noble and handsome, she would raise her head with a

kind of childlike pride as an Arabic steed ; her long neck then acquired that marmoreal and demanding energy like the neck of Antinous.

She propped her head in the palm of her hand and looked at that young monk with undefinable, resigned desire. The words of Francesco she took as a joke, although, in fact, she would have liked them to come true. She took a sombre pleasure in that contemplation. She would have liked — what would she ? Ah, who can possibly tell, whoever could possibly tell, what language could be rich enough to express the infinite feelings running wildly not in a tual love, but in a yearning for love. She was dreaming by the windov. Let her dream. A sin it would be to analyze her feelings, would it not?

III

As they were walking alon_, Onufrey and Hyeronimo did not notice that a man was followin_ them. It was the painter Hyeronimo was to call at the post-office where a letter was awaiting him, a letter from an uncle, an old hermit. This is what he wrote :

Beloved in Christ's name, my nephew,

It is such a wonderfully fine day as I am now writing to you and I am so full of the day's sweet freshness, of the scent of the land, of the myriad sounds of nature, that I almost feel inclined to confess to nature my thoughts, my feelings, my inner life.

My universe is a valley guarded on all sides by impenetrable rocks, a wall against the sea, so that no human soul may know this worldly paradise that I am living in. There is a single place to enter, a loose boulder that covers the entrance of a cave leading right into the heart of the island. Consequently, if not crawling through that cave, you might think that this island was a heap of barren rocks jutting out of the sea, deprived of vegetation and life. But what is the heart of it like ? The giant granite rocks rise around it like sombre guardians, while the lower part of the island, the valley that is deep and of course under the glassy sea lies covered by sheaves of flowers, wild vines, sweet-smelling tall grass never yet touched by the scythe.

Above the loose layer of vegetable life, a whole animal world. Bees by the thousands set the flowers a trembling, kissing their mouths, velvety bumble bees, the blue butterflies pervade a certain region of the air and beyond it you can see the sunlight shimmering. The tall rocks narrow down my horizon. I only have a piece of the sky, but what a piece! A sombre azure, limpid, transparent, with only now and then a small white cloud, like spilt milk, on the sky. In the middle of the valley there is a lake receiving the waters of four spring wells which patter, quarrel, murmur, and topple over gravel stones all day and all night. An eternal music in the summery stillness of the valley. Far away among the green grass and gravel-covered slopes you can see these springs moving and meandering, like silver, fluid, transparent, alive, falling into the arms of whirlpools where they crazily turn upon themselves, then hurry on, until with a sigh of satisfaction they plunge into the lake. In the center of this lake, which looks black as it mirrors the sedge, grasses and willows around it, there is another small island with a grove of orange trees. In this grove is the cave that I turned into a house and my bee garden. This island within an island is a flower garden that I myself planted for the sake of the bees. I do some kind of work all day. You know that in my youth I was apprenticed to a sculptor. Therefore, having smoothed down the stone of my cave, I decorated the surface of the walls with ornaments and figures in bas-relief, just as you do yourself with sketches. The difference being that sculpture is bare, consequently the figures that I model are naked. On one wall there is Adam and Eve. I tried to render primitive innocence in these forms. None of them is yet conscious of the meaning of love. They are in love without knowing it. The shapes are virginal and not yet ripe. The look on their faces expresses tenderness, not passion. This is a quiet, candid idyll between two people who are not aware of their beauty or nakedness, they walk embraced in the shade of a row of trees. In front of them a pack of lambs.

Venus and Adonis are quite different. Venus is the passionate love itself. Her head dizzy with passion leans on the shoulder of that femininely-handsome young man, who is shy and deeply in love. He steals a look at the perfect bodily form of the goddess who renders him fortunate, shyly he glances since he is ashamed to take a straight look. He plays the part of a guileless maiden whose lover just unrobed her.

Generally speaking, I am inclined to represent the aggressive woman. Man is aggressive by nature, in this respect nature being repeated in every single sample; the obvious exception to the rule is the aggressive woman. There is something unspeakably engaging in the manner that a woman in love, innocent and timid at the same time, is to approach a man who is either sullen for some kind of reason or even more chaste, more childlike than herself. You can see I am not referring to courtesans, to women whose experience is a guide to passionate love, but simply to the aggressiveness of womanly innocence. That's why I'm now working on Aurora and Orion, on the whitest of my walls. You are aware that maidenly Aurora abducted Orion with whom the cruel virgin Diana had fallen in love, taking him to the island of Delos. The face of my Orion expresses that underlying somberness and pride that you may see in the faces of any young men, the face of Aurora that unquenchable joyfulness of young maidens. To achieve an expression of aggressiveness in such a face is a difficult task. One thing seems strange to me. After the hours of passionate love a man feels deeply disheartened and sad; I even maintain that in such moments man is more capable of suicide, more indifferent to death than at any other time. On the other hand, I find that a virgin young man is more difficult to seduce than a maiden and that poor Venus must have had her agony with Adonis. There is a mystery in this preceding aversion, in sadness after sensual pleasure. But I cannot understand it.

I go to a school. You know what school, that of my bees. I believe that all the ideas floating on the surface of men's lives are just folds of a mantle on a moving body. They differ from the movement of the body, though created and subjected to it. Let us first consider the state of bees. Such order, art and harmony in it. Were they to have books, papers, universities, you would see men of letters building combinations of genius on the subject of this order and you would think it was the work of intelligence while you are aware that it is not intelligence, but something deeper that settles everything with a steady, infallible instinct. Take their colonies. Every summer we can see two or three generations forming colonies out of the maternal state. The satisfactory element is the absence of phrases and reasons commonly used in human society on the emigration of superfluous population.

Then consider the revolutions. Every year there is a revolution against the aristocracy, against the queen's courtesans, minus the social contract, parliamentary speeches, arguments in favor of the divine right or natural right. Cinis et umbra sumus.

But father, you'll answer, you're dealing in nature with ideas and concepts on the analogy of human circumstances, you are thus considering animal state organizations just as far as you see them similar to human organizations, understanding our world in theirs. Not so. People themselves lead an instinctual life. Customs and institutions on the basis of nature determine the existence of subjective religions, of wicked and miserable deeds though slyly well-planned and accommodated to the narrow-mindedness of most men. It's been like this ever since. You're born, you wed, you father children, you die, just as the animals do. Yet, instead of a country led by four-legged Don Juans, people have ball-rooms, dance, music, where you may likewise see young monocled monkeys nosing the females. Thus a good bit of time passes, you believe or do not believe the arguments in favor of the excellence of this world, and then you die. No one will then inquire what tiny ily has taught, produced scientific rubbish or, according to circumstances, has preached or fomented republican agitation. Maybe you're sometimes given moments of lucidity when you gaze as if waking from sleep and you suddenly see, in wonder, that you have been living in a strictly organized state of things without knowing or wanting it. This mind, which in the troubled and barren striving and fighting in the history of humanity, in the history of an elementary something occasionally experiences a flash of lucidity; should this tiny piece of nonsense have anything to say? Could it have an influence, a meaning, could it stand for anything in nature, it being nothing but a creation of the same natural state? Nothing of the kind.

The great migrations of peoples where the lesser sons abandoned the country while the maternal hive stood its ground offer an analogy with the swarming of the bees. Facts themselves are the truth, not the explanations given to facts.

The positive doctrines, religions, philosophical, legal or institutional are just many ingenious pleadings of this advocatus diaboli's mind in which the advocate is impelled by will to defend everything by argument. This despicable advocate

is forced to present everything in brilliant colors and since life is intrinsically miserable, he is bound to decorate the misery of existence with flowers and with a similitude of profound wisdom, in order to cheat in school and church the young who are just about to step on the stage, lying to them about the value of real life. Honor for public servants, glory for soldiers, magnificence for princes, fame for the scholars, heaven for the stupid, thus one generation deceives another by way of this inherited advocatus diaboli, through this slave forced into cunning and sophistry, who in one place laments as a cleric, in another cuts a serious demeanor as a professor, in a third pleads as a lawyer, or elsewhere puts on miserable faces as a beggar. This last one he acts for the prospect of a glass of wine, another for a nobility title, a third for a sum of money, yet another for a crown, but in each case the reason is essentially the same, a temporary state of intoxication.

That is what I learn from my teachers, the bees, at school with them I see that we are shadows with no will of their own, automatons performing what we have to perform ; lest the game would disgust us, we possess a handful of brains who would prove that we actually do what we want to, that we may do a thing or not ; this is a self-delusion by which the multiple probabilities are confused with what we are forced to do.

The internal life of history is instinctive ; the external life, kings clergymen, scholars are polish and phrasedogy. Just as judging by a silken garment thrown over a corpse you cannot tell the state of the corpse, so judging by these delusive garments you may not tell the state of history itself.

As concerns myself, thanks to the lessons of nature I have stripped myself of the garb of vanity. I know that you are so far a novice. Do not take orders, my son, do not put on a cassock and a monk's cowl pretending to be other than what you are, a good young man. I have been a hermit, not a monk. I should like someone to take my place in this hermitage, for I am an old man and the hour of delivery may sound any time. Come then, but only when I am dead. As long as I live don't trouble me. I need loneliness. Old age is a slow death. How slow my heart beats now, how fast it used to beat before I was sixty. This is the way of the world. One day it'll slow down, then cease beating, the

oil in the iconlight being burnt out. I know I will not feel the throes of death. It will be a quiet, natural passage that I do not fear. I will fall asleep and hope never to awake again... A kiss upon your brow, sweet soul,

Euthanasius.

IV

As Hyeronimus and Onufrey were coming out of an old building, Francesco, having seen them, picked up a conversation with the first, asking him to sit as a model for one of his pictures. Seeing no impediment to the old maestro's proposition, Hyeronimo agreed and the three of them made for the latter's home. On the way, father Onufrey touched the painter's hand as if by chance. It enclosed a few gold coins and Onufrey thought that whatever is found, naturally falls to the finder. Pressing the painter's hand with warm friendship and purloining intention, he thought it best to go his own way, the more so as the play of backgammon at the pub was fondly inviting; so he found some pretext or other and was gone.

Meanwhile Caesara, curious and restless, was messing about in the painter's room. She went up to the picture covered with a piece of linen, lifted it and looked how far the work representing 'The Fall of the Angels' had progressed. The Archangel Michael, his face serenely serious, was brandishing his fiery sword in the air. His fair locks fluttered around his marble-white face and protruding brow and his blue eyes were shining with strength and energy. His extended arm was pointing to chaos. The long white wings seemed to form an ellipsis over his shoulders and a diadem of blue stars floated over his brow. The background was chaos, in the upper part pierced by some dying star, dark and cold, in the lower region. Yet a grey stripe, an empty space, stood round the angel's sword, for the figure of the chased demon.

She heard the sound of footsteps in the lobby. A screen concealed the artist's bed. She slipped behind it, sat on the bed and peeped. Francesco and the young monk came in. Her heart beat against her ribs as if to smash them. Francesco showed Hyeronimo the picture and the place his figure

was to occupy on that canvas. Then they both entered a recess. Caesara did not move, she was as still as a mouse.

Francesco came back, looked for his painter's palette and brushes, lowered a blue silken curtain over the window giving the room a violet-blue hue, and set a black wooden pedestal in a convenient spot; the door of the dressing room opened and Caesara very nearly yelled, but she stopped her mouth with a tiny hand, covering her eyes with the other. Let us whisper; my readers, at least, should imagine I whisper in their ears. Let's see, did Caesara's hand stay upon her eyes? Her breasts had swollen under her heartbeats so that a button of that rather tight black velvet vest flew open. Whyever had she buttoned it? Yet who was to know that her heart would work under such a shock? She unbuttoned her vest, the snow-white breasts became free of their velvet prison, she took a deep, silent breath. Then she quickly covered her eyes again, the time to cool the turmoil in her soul. After which she raised a tiny finger, the little one, over her covered eyes and peeped through her fingers. She saw a fine head on broad white shoulders, a bust that seemed to be cut in marble. It was her girdle that was now very nearly bursting. She unhooked the buckle and breathing ever more freely, she began to consider the whole of that handsome model, whose muscles and shape breathed handsome pride and nobility. Her arms dropped, her hands in her lap, she was overcome with deep feelings, but had not yet looked her fill. She shook in every limb and you might have heard her teeth chattering had she not kept her mouth shut tight.

The painter's brush simply flew across the empty space that he had left on the canvas and Hyeronimo's features came to life, from the top of his head, one feature after another, down to the shoulders where the painter sketched two long, radiating black wings. It was a long sitting. Meanwhile Hyeronimo was standing on the pedestal, upright, motionless, proud as an ancient Apollo, in the halflight of the room that the painter had purposefully created to match the fundamental tone of the face.

"Hyeronimo," Francesco broke the silence in the room.

At these sounds Caesara was startled. A strange idea that the painter intended to put the screen aside came into her head. She would then be discovered, in her disordered attire, her hair dishevelled, her eyes burning in her head, her face blood-red. But it wasn't that.

The painter said :

"I am now working on the head. You must have been in doubt over something sometime in your life. Remember that situation so I can see that look on your face."

Hyeronimo called to mind old Euthanasius's letter. His lips slightly parted in a cold, sceptical smile. Oh, could he thus have turned to marble? His face expressed an arrogant pain ; a tear fell from poor Caesara's eyes.

"Yes, quite! That's the right look!" said Francesco, inspired. His eyes gleamed and his brush hurriedly sketched those features of sorrowful bitterness on the face of his sombre infernal genius.

"Deeply unhappy he must have been, since remembering this changes his face." Caesara thought and sweet quiet tenderness filled her soul. She was no longer the same person. Out of the turmoil she had been through, she was now calm. She loved him. In that beautiful white marble statue, in that stone still Adonis, she supposed there was a soul. She now felt like crying. Her lips parted in a sweet expression of sorrow and love, she buried her head in cushions and closed her eyes. She felt she was crying despite herself.

"I will want a few more sittings," Francesco said.

Caesara opened her eyes. Francesco had pulled the curtain aside and once more she saw her Adonis in full daylight. She covered her eyes again and heard the painter and Hyeronimo entering the adjoining dressing room. She sprang up stealthily, softly, rushed into her boudoir, threw herself on the bed, and buried her face in pillows crumpling anything that she could grasp. As Francesco came into her room, she hung around his neck, hugged him spasmodically, fondled and kissed him.

"What is it, child?"

"Nothing."

"Do you like him?"

She mumbled something, her eyes full of tears and desire.

V

Caesara to Hyeronimo.

Be kind when a woman tells you she loves you. A young and beautiful woman, for beauty I know I have. Yet I wonder, you are so proud, you can give such cold looks. Oh, I could

melt the icy look in your eyes with a kiss, beloved! Why should I disguise love in the garb of bashfulness, since I love you, since I should accept to be your servant, if you'd only let me into a corner of the house where you lodge, if you'll let me kiss the pillow where your head rests. See what an obedient, humble child love is. You think I am a shameless, wicked woman, deserving slander. But think of this: that I should be as tame as a lamb, that I should speak no word, that I should keep quite still looking upon you, if you'd only love me as I do. I know not what your heart is like. Could I possibly? Come and tell me what it is like, what goes on in that small chamber where I should like to stay, by my own self. Why, do you know my name?

Caesara

Hyeronimo to Caesara.

That you are beautiful, I do believe. That you love me, I do thank you. That you offer everything you think might make me happy, renders me capable to lay down my life for you. I gratefully kiss your hand for your intention to make me happy, though you are mistaken in believing that your woman's love may achieve it. Love is a calumity and the happiness you're offering, poison. That you do not know this is a fact that makes you adorable. If, for one moment, you'd look through my eyes, how different this world would appear, this world in which you seek and hope to find what is not in it: happiness. You ask me to love you. If I could love you as a star in the sky, why yes! But if I sigh, if I desire, don't I hear on all sides the same trivial sighs, the same vulgar desires; for what is their finality? Animal pleasure, breeding as the earth moulds maggots; so do we have the same detestable desires in our hearts, clothing them in moonlight as it shimmers on the lakes, the same sickening kisses likened to the lisping winds and the giddy swish of the beech leaves. Is it true or not?

Look at these young men, at their trivial smiles, their effeminate feelings, their equivocal whispers, look at those women who respond with voluptuous ogling, desirous lips, just look; it is around this instinct that human life revolves. Food and breeding, breeding and food! And will I fall into such ranks? Begging a kiss, a slave under your thumb,

trembling at the sight of your bare breast, the breast that shall shortly be a corpse and which, in essence, is such even this day? Shall I curl my hair to please you and tell you lies to delight your small mind; shall I turn into a puppet for... whoever can tell why. No! I will not act in the evil spirit that governs the world. I pity you, I pity myself, I pity the whole of humanity. I had rather wrench the fire in my heart, let it flare in small sparks rather than use it as fuel for a feeling that I consider not merely culpable but downright gross. Let them find pleasure in their embraces, let them love, let them die as they have lived. I shall pass through life indifferent, like any exile, like a paria, like a mad man. Only not as they are. The kernel of life is egotism and its garb is lie. I am neither an egotist nor a liar. Quite often, when climbing a big stone boulder, I feel as if, in the folds of the mantle thrown over my shoulder, I had turned stockstill and become a bronze statue. The world, in passing, knows that they have no feeling in common with this bronze. Leave me alone in my cold pride. If the world were to perish and I could save it by a lie, I would not tell that lie and leave the world to its doom. Why do you want me to step down from a pedestal and join the crowd? I look upwards, like Apollo's statue. Be you the star in the skies, cold, luminous! Then would my eyes for ever gaze on you!

H.

Hyeronimo had left the monastery on the counsel of Euthanasius and was living in isolation, in a small room in town that he had decorated with flowers and sketches by his own hand. In this would-be hermitage he was often visited by Francesco. One day he showed the latter Caesara's letter.

"Now, do you mean to say no?"

"Here is what I say," he answered showing his own.

"Do what you like, but come to my studio today, for my picture is finished."

They proceeded and came to Caesara's house.

"Miss Caesara," Francesco introduced as they entered.

"Caesara?" Hyeronimo murmured in wonder, giving a long and serious look to the poor girl's bashful red face.

He sat down on the corner of a sofa and seemed to be out of sorts. Francesco left the room: Caesara threw herself at the young man's feet, hands joined together, trembling and very nearly weeping.

"Oh," she said under her breath, as if afraid of what she was saying; grasping his hand she raised it to her lips, "can you bear my love? Just bear it, for I am not asking you to love me; but suffer to be loved, like a child. I hear you are a woman-hater, a solitary creature and I never despaired in loving you."

He put his arm around her waist and gently raising her from the ground, sat her by him: then he cupped her head in his hand and gazed straight and long into her eyes. It seemed strange. He could hardly believe what he saw.

"Do you speak the truth?" he asked.

She bent her head. She had seen his smile and had seen enough to give up all hope. "Ah," she thought, "a man like him, what pleasure should he find in a superficial doll, in this waxen mask of mine? It goes without saying. Another man would feel flattered; not he, not even flattered. He well knows love is his due and he just asks me, like a teacher to his pupil, in a friendly but cold enough way: 'Do you speak the truth?'"

Another woman, taking more pride in her beauty, would have left the room blue in the face with anger and injured to death. A woman does not offer her love to be refused. Caesara? She was just sad. She would have cried, wept her eyes out, but could not be vexed with him.

He, the more he looked at her, the more beautiful she seemed. He pitied her, yet could not give her false hopes, as any other man but himself would have done.

"It's not that you lack in beauty, Caesara. Let us talk quietly. I will address you personally, for you are dear to my heart, though I do not love you the way I would have it. Listen. I have never been in love, maybe I cannot. But one thing I want you to believe. I do not love anyone, but were I to love, you would surely be my beloved. I feel a kind of worship for you in my heart which may possibly become love if, well, if you wouldn't love me yourself. I do not know how to describe the strange feeling that freezes my heart, not exactly makes it cold, but apathetic. I have no desires and you have taught me to have them. You think

it strange, so do I. It's as if I would kiss you, were you not to kiss me back. It's as if I could love you if you were angry with me."

"I cannot be, I can't pretend, not ever," she said. "It is sad," she added quietly, her voice somewhat deeper, "for your love is the key to the happiness of my whole life. Castelmare has now a free hand. There is no reason for me now to refuse to marry him since you don't care for me. I no longer want to run away from my father, since I have to forget my misfortune, if possible, by means of another misfortune. I am a woman. I used to think I was beautiful. I no longer do. I used to think I had a right to despise the feelings of a man who loves me. I was cruelly and equally rewarded for my scorn."

"Caesara," he said gently, moved as he was, "will you let me think this over"? I have a strange heart and mind. Nothing ever enters them spontaneously. An idea stays with me for days, on the mind's surface : it doesn' affect me nor does it interest me. After a number of days only does it sink to the bottom of my head ; there, in conjunction with other ideas that may be found there, it becomes firmly rooted. Caesara, it goes the same with my feelings. I may well see a man drop dead in the street with no reaction at first. Hours later, only, the scene reappears and I begin to weep. I weep profusely and an indelible trace is left in my heart. You want me to pity you. I say : pity me : for if ever love should enter my heart, I would die of it. You do not understand me, yet I do feel that love and death will be close together. Whatever is spontaneous in me is sympathy and this you have entire. Love me if you will, if (let me speak this sweet word) if you have the grace so to will. You think I would be unable to love you, do you ? You are wrong. Just give me time : that your image may work its way deep into my heart ; that I may get accustomed to this idea, I, a man unloved, who has never loved anyone. Yet I still think I might go crazy in loving you."

He kissed her forehead and went out. She smiled. She took a packet of playing cards, charmed them with a magic formula, to see if he would come the following day ; she said softly as she was displaying the cards one after another : "Were he to come tomorrow, I will love him ; should he not come, then, then, I will love him all the same."

Hyeronimo to Euthanasius.

I fondle a maiden's head in my own way, that is filling a sketchbook with the various expressions of a single face. It is a strange thing that my eyes, so clear, I may say of a heavenly clarity, cannot perceive anything in its entirety, on the spot. I scrawl all over the walls. I called on a maiden who is in love with me, but whom I do not love. I've seen her blushing, timid, upset. I have sketched that look in my book. She knelt by me asking me to suffer her love. I cannot possibly describe the expression of innocence, candour and love on her face, but I made a sketch of it. It's worth a kiss, my sketch is. It is, maybe, one of the truest that I ever drew. I keep it by my side. Perplexity and sweet resignation. An angelic profile. I said kind words to her. There was a flash of hope in that gentle sadness of that face. A treasure of a sketch. But I feel that the sketches grow ever more familiar to my heart. I do not love her. No, I do not. Farewell, father.

You do love her, my boy, though you do not know it. Cinis et umbra sumus.

Euthanasius.

VI

There are men whom observant minds as well as women read at first sight, people of small wit, but of a strong will, consistant characters. Such a character was Castelmare. Had a woman heard him pull the bell she would have instantly known the manner in which to receive him; a good actor hearing his firm step, heavy and rigidly regular, echoing along the galleries and corridors of the Bianchi palace, by reconstructive imagination, without a glimpse of him, he could have guessed the character of the man in question: a nature common, consistent and strong.

Having once made up his mind to marry Caesara, with or against her will, all means whatever were acceptable, though he had few at his disposal, since he had small ability for the purpose. Yet since he was not without intelligence, he was trying to discover if the sly maiden had by chance another love.

Hyeronimo, though ignorant of the nature of his feeling for Caesara, chose to obey her as a child his elder sister; frankly speaking, she used the power she had over him in a way quite unpardonable. In her presence he felt a kind of tenderness in his heart, a kind of strange thrill, the memory of which haunted him for days on end. You could not call it love, for though he delighted in her presence, he would rather think of her when he was far away. In such rememorations, while playing with her image, her actual presence was downright distasteful. He felt something like a thorn in the flesh she being present — he no longer possessed that dreamlike freedom which was the essence of his life and the only happiness of a character content without love or hate. "If she would only leave me alone," he thought, "I could bear it. I would hold her small hand and we should gaze at the moon, the virgin moon. I would then contemplate her as a marble statue or like an image painted against a luminous background in a book of icons. Her hair looks like golden froth, so fine is it. And her face glows in a strange way. But she won't leave me alone, not for the world. She will throw her arms around my neck, kiss me, saying that I love her. Nay, confound it all! Apart from that she is quite beautiful, strictly speaking. Her chin like a round golden apple, her mouth sometimes like a cherry and her eyes, oh those eyes! If she would only keep them away from mine, she touches my lashes and I shiver down to the soles of my feet. Then do I no longer see how beautiful she is. A dark fog covers my eyes and I could then kill her. This is no life but downright torture. Why, to be honest, poor child, she has no idea that she is torturing me."

He was walking in the garden of the Bianchi palace. Like the wings of a wild eagle, the black, dry hair framed that lovely weary face as if fashioned of Paros marble. The half-closed lids revealed the large size of his eyes, of a dark demonic blue, yet disdainful; the half-closed lips revealed a forcible pain; the neck alone curbed proudly, as if undaunted by the hardship of life. The night was clear, the air looked snowy in the moonlight peeping through the dark greenery of the trees. He sat on a bench, hands joined together, limp upon his knees, head hanging down and hair dishevelled over his brow; vaguely thinking thoughts that he wasn't aware

...; the moon alone sailing among the clouds filled the night with dreams. A slight swish was heard which woke him. It was she. There was a change in her. Her face, no longer drawn, was visibly rounded, her breasts were fuller, the color in her cheeks had gone, displaced by a pallor that lent her an air of incredible gentleness. Her eyes had no longer that wild, nocturnal brilliance, the depth of which flashed with sombre love and hungry desire; nay, clear and unspeakably profound you might have gazed days on end into them. A calm and melancholy peace was in their depth. It had pale, full yet sad face, the purple mouth was painfully smiling, a rose of Jericho the beauty of which never withers. She came slowly along the path bathed in the moon's clear light, along white alleys decorated with the shadows of meshed leaves. She saw him but did not quicken her pace. Had she guessed what his character was like? Maybe. He sat still, gazing upon her coming slowly, as if moonstruck, like a sleepwalker.

His elbow on the back of the seat, he placed his chin on his hand, gently moving his fingers, gazing in wonder, with shining eyes, at her luminous face as she was coming. She sat down by him, the moonlight full on her. She did not touch his hand, nothing. The moon silvered her becomingly and she was sly enough to let herself be fully bathed in this gentle and voluptuous light. He went on gazing. He was first to reach and gently clutch her slender, cold little hand. "Why, yes!" he thought, while a sensation never felt before shot through his heart, "I do like her now, indeed." He then gently went up to her lithe, light body and bending down, he gently whispered into her ear, though in passionate accents:

"Look at the moon, the midnight moon, as lovely as a fourteen day-old baby and so cold. Can't you feel that delicate sorrow, that every desire, every aspiration ceases in the contemplation of this fine picture, yourself a part of it. In my mind you are now an angel, more beautiful than I ever saw you, tender. Don't you know that I love you?"

She thrilled, but kept silent.

"Then look over the whole town, a brilliant lot of palaces and domes, just look how the tower tops and the sails of boats on the river shine in the moonlight over the darker masses. In spite of all this, the center of the picture is your own self, you! Not a sound. Except a nightingale far away, in some garden and a swirl of water swishing gently. Silent

and innocent you're gazing upon this world. Roses are blooming in your face. You, a queen of the spirit; you are as pure as well-water, are you not, as lissome as a cypress, as sweet-voiced as Philomela, as young as the full moon, childlike like a canary, worshipped like a divinity. Look," he said under his breath, "look at that narrow dark street. Its shadow is pierced by a shaft of light in a single corner, but that spot looks snow-covered. Come with me, come home with me. I'll draw away the curtain in my room's window and we shall gaze at the sky all night long. Why, I love you!" he shouted firmly, "I do love you, only too well I realize that I love you!" He held her so tight that they were both clenched in a long nervous grip. Then, tired with such unparalleled commotion never before experienced, he dropped against the back of the seat, closed his eyes, his head upon the seat's back. The moon shone full in his face. Caesara stood before him, bowed down over him and leaning with both hands upon the back of the bench, she kissed him, eyes half-closed, with innumerable kisses. He felt nothing; like a child, drowsy, fondled by his mother.

There was a rustle of leaves in a bush. "God in Heavens!" she thought in fear, "what if they had seen me? Maybe Castelmare. Poor boy! However will he reach home? That man may be watching."

She waited a moment for him to wake up from that ecstasy; then she questioned gently as if trying but slowly to interrupt his thoughts, his sleep.

"Are you a swordsman?"

"I am," he said.

"Let me bring a sword, shall I?"

"Yes, do."

"And you'll give me a kiss for it?"

"I will."

She ran up the stairs into the palace and two minutes later she came with a sword, girding him with it, taking this opportunity to put her arms tight around his waist.

"My sweet icicle, you marble, you stone, you!"

"Leave me alone, Caesara. I wish I were dying."

"No, no, my angel. Go home. Let no harm come near you on the way. Think of your own Caesara, my treasure." She couldn't help taking his head into her cupped hands and kissing him once more, a passionate and sounding kiss.

"Now go away, please go!"

"Why do you ask it ?"

"Because I would kill you if you stayed."

"Kill me, how ?"

"I know how," she said, as sly as a child.

She led him on to a forest path and pushed him out of the garden. Then turned and putting her arms round the trunk of a tree, she spoke under her breath, with a kind of spite :

"Hyeronimo ! I'll bite you !"

She beat her fists against the tree-trunk, then went to her room ; furiously she tore at her velvet vest, she tangled her fair hair, then gazed into a mirror, her eyes full of tears, her lips trembling. She threw herself on the bed murmuring softly, very softly, tender, unspeakably tender words smothered with tearful sighs, a single name, more distinctly pronounced sounded : Hyeronimo.

Things fared differently with Hyeronimo. He was making for the narrow street. The soft night air had brought him to his senses and being less sensual than his dove, he was left with the theoretical conviction that he loved her. He went along the dark street with a light step indicating an elastic weight, as you feel it in a horse of breeding. He heard behind him a severe, soldierly step and knew it was Castelmare. He stopped and turned the way whence the sound came. Castelmare showed up. Silence. Hyeronimo struck a stone wall with the point of his sword and in the flashing light both rivals recognized each other. That very moment, without as much as one word, the swords crossed, then a groan and a heavy fall on the hard street pavement ; one of the two shadows disappeared in a heap nearby. The other lay dumb.

VII

Stretched out on his bed, Hyeronimo had pulled the window curtain aside to watch the moon sinking into the river, turning its surface into a soft luminous path, when he heard a soft knock on the door. It was the painter.

"Young man," he said, "you must leave town, as soon as possible."

"Why ?"

"You've killed Castelmare."

"I know."

"You do. Yet what you seem to ignore is the fact that he is the nephew and inheritor of this town's *podestà*, that duels are forbidden here and that you may be hanged."

"I don't care."

"You don't't care ? Where did you learn this way of speaking, my boy ?" the old man quietly added. "I should be sorry for your very fine head. Besides, there's something else to consider."

He handed a piece of paper scribbled in crooked lines. Hyeronimo unfolded it.

Caesara to Hyeronimo.

Run away, I beg you. You have not killed Castelmare. Bleeding, almost choking with blood, he told his men to take him to our house. He told everything, whose work his wound was. Run, do, please. They may be on your tracks this very night. What is even worse is that the count wishes to become engaged to me in his present state and I have no strength whatever to offer resistance ! But I love you. Believe me, I won't survive this misfortune. By staying, you wouldn't save me, just kill me with anxiety, my bird of paradise ! Run away and maybe... alas, for some hope to cling to ! Can't you see that I can't find my words. I would say, come here, but I cannot. Just think, would I imperil you just to see you once more ? No, run away, Hyeronimo ; maybe some impossible occurence may keep me for your own. Maybe the count will die. I hope he will. I love you. But no, not as much as to ask you to stay. Farewell, my love.

Caesara.

Hyeronimo threw his mantle upon his shoulders and they went to the river where Francesco gave him his boat. He hugged his old friend, untied the boat from the shore, stepped inside and floated down the river ; having reached the full shining seawaters, he dumped oars and rudder into the water, lay supine under the lofty splendour of the sky and thus, a floating seed on the infinite expanse of the sea, he plunged into deep sleep.

The following day, as he opened his eyes, the sun was high up in the sky. He noticed that his boat was stuck among some stony rocks. The sun was lord of the sky and filled the watery deep with light. On the continental shore an old abbey showed among wooded rocks; along its colonnades of heavy stone and in the covered porch, nuns were walking, with slow measured step. Close by the walls of the monastery, a garden sloped down to the seashore, the sea gently lapping at a bough of cypress and roses hidden by a toppling rock, looking like a sheltered bathing place. He took off his shoes and jumping from rock to rock he explored this rocky empire. He came upon a spring of fresh sweet water that noisily gushed from the deep of a cave. He entered the cave. A bracing coolness enveloped him, wholesome since he had been sunburnt in his sleep. He walked on. The cave seemed to grow ever longer and became ever darker. He suddenly saw a gleam of bright light, but he thought it was a bolt. Seeing that it was not fading he went nearer and saw a hole large enough to put your hand through, opening on to the other side. He looked through it, saw heavy bushes and was struck by a smell of sleep-lulling weeds. He tried to enlarge the hole by the strength of his hands, but it was granite rock, hard to move; yet one huge boulder seemed to stir. He pushed it — the boulder turned as if on hinges, leaving a tiny entrance, a space that he could crawl through. He went in, quickly pushed the boulder back, covering even the tiny gleam of light with earth and stones and turning to see where he had entered, he stood still at the beauty of the view.

Gigantic heavy stone rocks stood around, rock upon rock, sky-high; a valley dipped down amid them, a garden of a dell, with springs of water, a lake in the center and an island in the middle of the lake where the hives of a large bee garden stood in long rows.

"It's the island of Euthanasius," he thought in wonder, stepping gently and marvelling at every step. The very insects were tame in this Edenic place. Strange butterflies, blue, golden, red, covered his long dark hair, so that his head seemed to be strewn with flowers. The air of this island was alive with murmuring hymns of bees, bumble-bees, butterflies; the grasses grew chest-high, vetchling laid flowery snares to one's feet; warm air, a voluptuous scent, filled the

heavenly place. He walked up to the lake and fording it, came on to the island. The bees came humming round the new young emperor of this paradise. He looked for the cave which, he knew, was sure to be on the island. He actually found it carved in stone, found a chisel, carving tools, a bed, a water pitcher: but the old man was missing. A written sheet lay on a small table.

I feel the marrow of my bones becoming clay, my blood frozen and thin like water, my eyes hardly mirroring the world I live in. I am dying out. There's nothing left but an earthen pitcher that held the light of a rich life. I will sit under the waterfall of a stream; creepers and water flowers shall wrap my body in their vegetable growth and my hair and beard into a tissue of fine threads; in the palms of my hands opening to the sun, the eternal source of life, the wasps shall build their honeycombs, their waxen citadels. The ever-flowing fresh waters of the river shall dissolve my body, assimilating me to the whole of nature and keep me from rotting. Thus my dead body will dwell for years under the rushing stream, like an old monarch of fairy tales, in an age-long sleep, on a magic island.

Hyeronimo looked at the walls with scenes of love, saw old books and plenty of written sheets on the shelves of a cupboard leaning against the wall; he sniffed at the water in the pitcher and as it was foul and evil-smelling he concluded that the old man had died. So he, the natural heir of this peaceful refuge of the garden, sheltered like a room, rummaged through the books, all choice ones, promising deep and long enjoyment; the old man's writings, each thought being a cypher of that profound and happy brain, each phrase having such resonance as to determine a whole train of thoughts and analogies in the young man's head. He soon became familiar with his small empire; it was like home, he tended the garden and the honeycombs, walking like a wild doe among the bushes and grasses of the island.

On warm nights he often lay naked on the shore of the lake, only lightly covered. The whole of nature, the singing white wells of water, the roar of the sea, the splendor of the night then plunged him into a deep and happy sleep, wherein he lived like a plant, with no sorrow, no dream, no desire.

VIII

On the day of Caesara's wedding to Castelmare, her father, marquis Bianchi, died of an apoplectic stroke in the midst of wine glasses and of his table companions. When she saw him stretched out on the bed, eyelids yet half-open over glassy eyes, his mouth full of foam, she leaned against the wall in the recess of the window; she looked in disgust upon that corpse that had lived solely for its own sake and who, to assuage certain passions that were bound to come to such an end, was ready to sell her, the very picture of a madonna, to the one man she most hated in the world.

Coming up to her, Castelmare began to comfort her:

"My lady," he said, "your father is dead and you're left with no protection whatsoever in the world, except myself, your future husband."

"Nay, without as much," she said, "for you are no longer my future husband, my year of mourning has at least postponed that happy perspective. You may knock again on my door when the mourning year is over."

Castelmare went away displeased, giving her a last look of unmitigated hate. Francesco advised her to leave town where she was in danger to be followed by her cruel admirer and to retire to a nunnery a few hours away; she actually went there after her father's funeral.

She had grown thin with worry, poor child. She hadn't heard anything from Hyeronimo, except that Francesco's boat, in which he had sailed out to sea, had been found smashed on the shore, so that she considered him drowned, long since dead.

Within the peaceful walls of the monastery she became her old self again.

Her cell looked out on the garden and the sea. Quite often, having bolted the door to prevent anyone entering and disturbing her, she would gaze for hours on the permanent surge of waves vanishing into the far-away horizon; on the garden, lovely and grown wild, bushes and trees sloping down to the seashore; at times, walking the shady paths, she would weed the grass growing on the path or would hide in some bush near the shore, sitting there for hours, lost in her hopeless longing.

On warm days, she would undress and leaving her clothes in the bush, she would walk down to the sea. A wonderful shape, a snowy apparition, blending the sweet softness of childhood with the noble, ripe, pleasant well-marked beauty of a woman. The blue veins were almost visible through the general transparency of a smooth skin ; as her foot touched the sea, as she felt the waves bathing her body, her smile turned nervous and indomitable as her childhood had been. Fighting the old ocean she felt rejuvenated, smiling, her mouth tightly clenched with energy ; she gave way to the ocean's tumultuous embrace, her white arms occasionally cleaving the blue waves ; swimming on her side or back, voluptuously sprawling on the bed of waves.

Night was falling. Again did she give way to her passion for the waves, smiling with intense and sweet well-being ; she laid bare her snow-white neck, she let her hair loose around her shoulders and breasts grown full with a longing for love ; finally naked and beautiful like an ancient statue, possessing, moreover, the advantage of life, that warm, soft, smooth skin showing imprints if touched. She jumped into the sea and began to swim, fixing as her goal a few rocks that she could see at a quarter of an hour from the shore.

The quiet waves floated her and she soon reached the rocks in the sea. She gently proceeded along them touching the rocky walls with her hands, reached a cave out of which a divided, luminous stream was flowing, went inside following the course of the stream, when suddenly a celestial panorama stood before her eyes. "Good God, what a heavenly place !" she thought, "I'll stay here a while." She walked on across the grass which, warm and sweet-smelling, tickled her body ; she threw herself into the lake, as clear as tears, the waters of which nearly sent her to sleep ; she would then have a run across the orange grove, butterflies and bees chasing her. She was quite crazy, like a child astray in an enchanted fairy tale garden. Finally, seeing that the sun was sinking, she turned the way she had come, but great was her terror as she could see no way out.

What was she to do ? Thinking that she had gone astray she looked around once more. No way out.

"Why," she thought, "what if I were to spend the night in this enchanted heavenly place ? Who can see me, who knows me ?"

. . . . . .

Night had fallen. Big, white stars were trembling in the sky and the moon's silvery light was sailing through transparent waves of clouds curling across its path. The night was warm, heavy with the scent of armfuls of flowers; the hills glowed in a shroud of mist. The quiet waters of the lake around the glade gleamed like silver; the glowing waves occasionally lapped the dreamy shores. Across this fairy-like night descended upon a heavenly spot surrounded by the sea, Caesara walked like a snowy phantom, her long golden hair reaching down to her ankles. She walked slowly. The dreams, the enchantment of a fragrant summer night had invaded her virgin soul. She was on the verge of tears. Thinking of her lover she fancied she was Eve in paradise, alone with her grief. She came up to the lake and saw a path of graved stones under the surface. She began to cross the lake, the water circling apace around her ankles. She gazed on that enchanted glade. A yearning for happiness filled her heart; she was craving for love like a young tender child, her lips were parched with longing for a kiss, her mind was lifeless like a bed of flowers half-burnt by drought. Having reached the glade, the scented shade of the tall trees fell like a blue reflection on her skin so that she looked like a marble statue in the bluish light. Suddenly, among the trees, she saw the figure of a man. She thought it was her imagination, a figment projected upon the mesh of leaves. That figure assumed ever clearer outlines. It was Hyeronimo.

"Why," she thought, "what a fool I am. He is present everywhere, in the night's splendour, in the silence of the glades." He came nearer. He, too, thought a lifelike figure stood before him. He gave her a long look, they gazed a long time upon each other.

As he took her hand, she shrieked.

"Caesara," he shouted embracing her, "Caesara! Are you an imaginary figment, a dream, a shadow of the night in the snowy light of the moon? Or is it you? You!"

She was crying, could not answer. She thought she was crazy, she thought it was a dream and only longed for the dream to last forever.

"Is it you? Your own self?" she asked in a strangled voice. Her mind was clearing, all her dreams were returning,

splendid and yearning for life. She could not stop gazing on him and had quite forgotten the state she was in.

. . . . . .

CAESARA'S DEATH

The evening had turned cloudy. Shut up in her cell, Caesara sat by the window, her head among the flower pots, her brow against the window pane, her fingers pattering upon it. She smiled a sly smile. Hyeronimo had never been so open-hearted, had never loved her as much as he did now, that he knew what was in her heart. And why should she be smiling? Had she found the loop to ensnare her lover forever? She had not. But a would-be philosophical thought crossed her mind. "Man is an animal after all," she said, "and loves his young above all things. His young? Oh, if I only had a little one, I should devour it with boundless love. Strange creatures we are, both men and women, the manifold ways we look upon the simplest thing in the world, our young." She threw herself upon the bed. It seemed she had a baby at her breast and fondled it, she then wrapped up a small cushion patting it, fondling it as if it were her baby.

It had grown dark and the rain started a quick monotonous patter against the window panes. Now and again a flash of lightning would illumine the interior of the cell; in that rapid flare the whole house and all objects seemed to give a start, to quicken into life, such is the fantastic nature of a flash of lightning.

She went up to the window. Outside the weather was fearful. Black clouds split by lightning were crowding in the sky, the sea was heaving with deep uproar like the distant bellowing of bulls; suddenly, she saw a burning fire.

"Great God," she thought in fear, "Hyeronimo has lit a fire on such a night. Maybe just for a while."

The fire was constantly burning with ever greater force.

"Could he be in danger," she thought "and should this be a signal for me?" She shook in all her limbs, her lips were bloodless and pale.

She rushed into the garden, reached the shore. The island was not to be seen, but the fire went on burning like

coals on the face of the sea. She seemed to hear a voice, only just as if her ears were tingling. Fear and despair seized her heart.

"Ah," she thought "who knows what happened ! I must swim, no matter what the weather is like, I must see him."

She stripped and plunged into the sea to reach the burning spot. She kept on swimming, swam apace, but it seemed she was not advancing, at least the ember spot was keeping the same distance.

The billows drove her about like a mere leaf, hurling her from one swarming foam to another. She swam with all her might. The sky was pitch black, a flash of lightning shot through the clouds at times. She swam, already close to the place when she saw that the fire was drifting on the waters.

She yelled. She then saw it was a fire in a boat, in the middle of the sea. The moment she yelled the fire went out. Then she lost all hope. She floated on the water to see, in a flash of lightning, the direction of the island. Island and shore were far away and she herself a prey to the boundless sea. A fearful flash of lightning crossed the vast sea. Then she saw, some ten paces away, a black boat and in it, upright, with a stern, harsh, implacable look on his face, stood Castelmare. Then she understood. In a flash she realized her desperate state and lost consciousness, never to recover it.

Meanwhile, Hyeronimo had accidentally caught sight of the floating fire and, like a flash of lightning, what might happen crossed his mind. He lit a stable fire on the shore, jumped in a boat and followed the fugitive flame, never forgetting his sword. He rowed desperately hard and having caught up with the boat where embers were still live, he saw Castelmare. He brought his own boat near, took aim ; there was a flash of lightning and he heard the thump of a heavy body in the enemy's boat.

He lit a torch and paddled gently ; he suddenly saw something singularly white floating on the water. A couple of arms seemed to rise from the deep and fall back. He paddled near. It was Caesara. He pulled her out of the water, wrapped her in his mantle, began to rub her hands and her eyelids, but there was no sign of life.

"God Almighty, she cannot be dead, can she ?" he thought and the blood rushed to his heart.

"Caesara," he whispered, "Caesara, my love." Her mouth was half open, purple lips sucked in, teeth shining, eyelids open and eyes like frost on glass. He carried her quickly to the shore, into the cave, lit a fire, wrapped her up, rubbed her body, but to no avail. She was dead, as dead can be.

He coudn't believe it. Dead, she was dead, she no longer belonged to him ; her eyes, her mouth, her tiny hands no longer his as long as he lived ; never to hang about his neck, never to charm his ear with smothered whispers. He couldn't believe it, as no one does on the death of a beloved creature.

"Caesara," he said quietly, "you're surely pretending, you're joking, you're not dead, how could you die ?" No answer.

His eyes grew suddenly angry. His teeth were chattering as if with fever, he was afraid, afraid of his own self, of the walls ; he stretched his arm towards the corpse ; he seemed to hear the hum of many voices, a hand seemed to press his chest ; he breathed, but his breathing was like hot air burning his lungs, he rose to his full height, straightened his shoulders in fear, his hair stood on end, his nostrils dilated ; visions of fire burnt into his mind, he saw lightning, ever more lightning flashes, as if his brain were scorched through and through ; he broke into wild laughter and fell to the ground.

The following day he was lying upon a soft bed, in a house with all windows framed in ivy and flowers ; the sunrays filtered through, cutting a shaft in the scented darkness ; a world of diamond specks was dancing in the light of this ray. Caesara was sitting on a stool in the corner and laughed.

"Good Lord, what a fearful dream I had," he said.

She was laughing, but said no word. It seemed to be his cell in the abbey, yet much more beautiful, and sweetened by the presence of his beloved. He rose, knelt by his love, put one arm around her neck, the other around her waist ; she went on laughing, but it was as if she was dumbfounded.

"Oh, I know your voice, my pretty !" he said smiling, "why keep silent, child. Oh ! you flower of my life, you angel !"

His voice was choking with excitement, he was weeping tears of love. Her head kept dropping on his chest, she seemed to have fallen asleep in his arms.

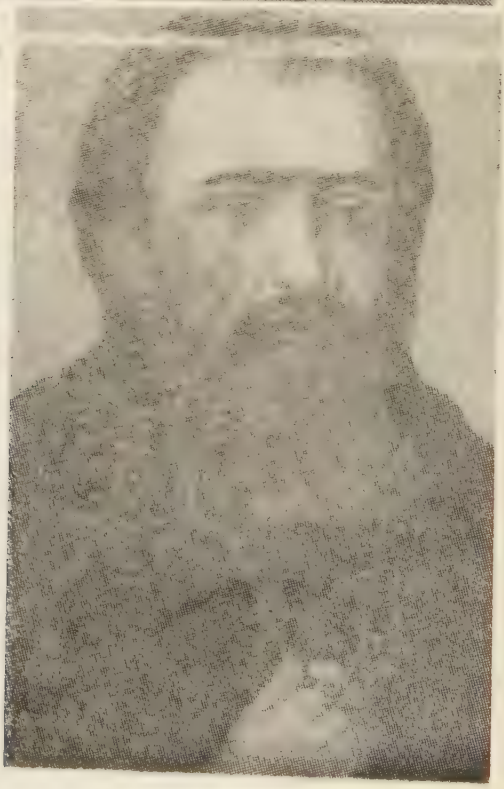
"So lovely she is," he thought, trembling. Only now did he notice that she was naked. He ran to his bed, laid her upon it. She seemed to sink into the pillows. Pillows with blue sheets. He lay down beside her. Yet she seemed to slip away into those too soft pillows. He hugged her close, holding her against his body. He closed his eyes and seemed to crush her lips with kisses. Choking while kissing. His senses vanished, he seemed to stop thinking, he fell asleep, fast asleep.

Upon its soft, blue bed, the sea bore two bodies united in a tight embrace. The wind blew among the branches of an old tree, stirring among its hanging boughs the bones, now bleached by the running stream, of an old bearded man, whose prophecy had now come true.

1. Boyhood home of Ion Creangă in Humuleşti.

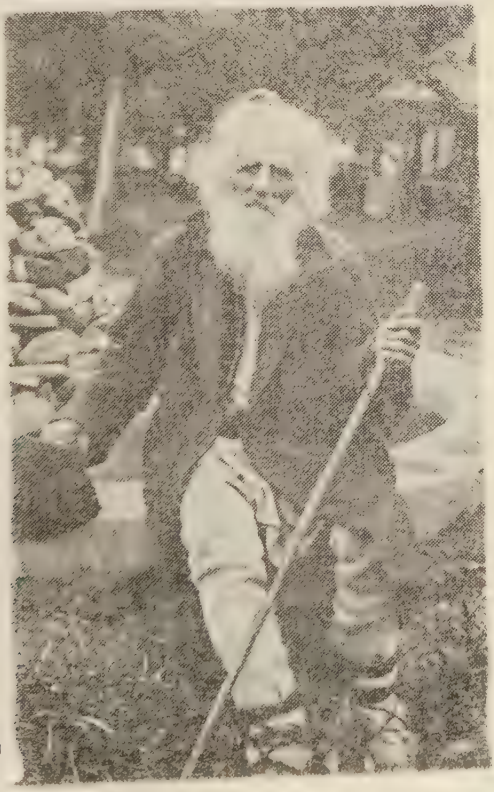
2. Interior of Creangă's home in Humuleşti.

3. Church of St. Nicholas in Humulești.



4. Father Duhu.

5. School of Father Duhu in Tîrgu Neamț. Today — Museum of History.



6. Cousin of Ion Creangă from Humulești.

9. Bojdeuca — Home of Ion Creangă in Iași.

10. Monastery of Golia in Iași.

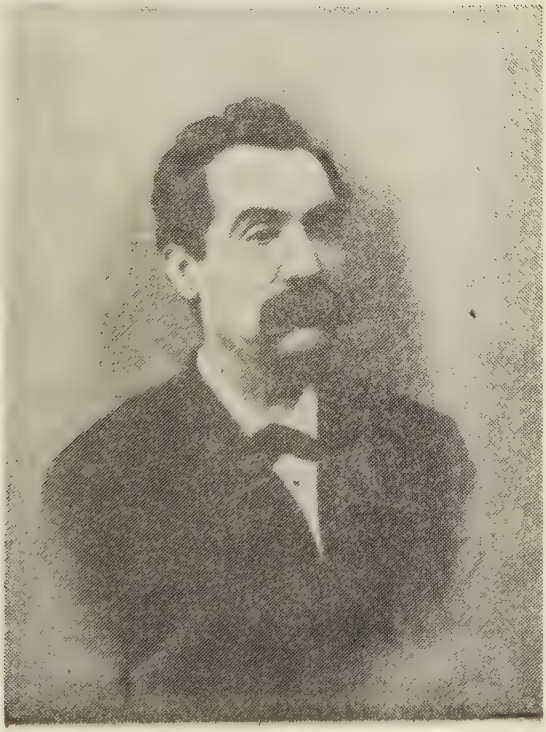
7. The Fortress of Neamț.

8. Interior view of the Fortress of Neamț.

11. Three Hierarchs Church in Iaşi.

12. Tomb of Ion Creangă in "Eternitatea" cemetery in Iaşi.

13. Mihai Eminescu
in 1872, at age 22.



14. Mihai Eminescu
in 1887 at age 37.

15. Boyhood home of Mihai Eminescu in Ipoteşti.

16. Pogor House in Iaşi. Meeting place of the Junimea Society. Today — Museum of Literature.

17. Statue of Ştefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great) in front of the Palace of Culture — Iaşi.

POSTSCRIPT : EMINESCU AND CREANGA

A friendship, apparently inexplicable, between two people who seem to be totally different, has been and remains a cause of astonishment. For the superficial onlooker the cause of astonishment is strong and convincing enough. To begin with, their social origin was different. Mihai Eminescu (born 1850) belonged to a family of small country boyars, while Ion Creangă (born 1837) descended from peasant freeholders, *răzeşi*, in the county of Neamţ. The first had free access to schools at all levels up to the universities of Vienna and Berlin where he spent five years (1869—1874), primarily dedicated to philosophical studies. The second man had the village school as the basis of his education, followed by a few years at a clerical seminary where he studied to become a rural parish priest. A few additional terms at a teachers' training school in Iaşi enabled Creangă to become an able schoolmaster.

Eminescu's vast learning in world culture, his German philosophical and poetic scholarship, remain open to speculation and the sources of his work are the object of research which necessarily covers an uncommonly broad area.

Creangă's knowledge of foreign languages was all too small. World culture spoke to him through Romanian folklore, it being full of rustic universal wisdom that had been adapted to the national spirit.

Back in his native country after studies abroad, Eminescu joined the *Junimea* literary society, which was composed of refined intellectuals, mostly of aristocratic origin. Though he faced material difficulties, Eminescu's genius was appreciated above all by Titu Maiorescu (1840—1917), an important political figure and man of culture, the mentor of the Junimea society. When the Junimea society joined the Conservative Party, it was Maiorescu that helped the poet become editor of the conservative newspaper *Timpul* where he worked until the onset of his illness, which brought on insanity in 1883.

The range of Creangă's life was, on the contrary, uneventful and narrow. As an elementary school teacher in Iaşi he preserved his peasant way of life. In his house, which he nicknamed *bojdeucă*, located in the humble outskirts of Iaşi, Creangă went on living as in the Humuleşti village of his boyhood.

It so happened, however, that these two men were destined to meet ; it was in 1875, on the occasion of an inspection at the school

where Creangă taught by Eminescu who was then a school inspector. It was an important day for both of them as a lifelong friendship resulted.

Eminescu discovered in Creangă a peasant genius of rare and authentic force. The romantic poet, weighed down by philosophical questionings, having translated Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and trying to adapt Shakespearean sonnets; the poet preoccupied with oriental cosmogonies, desiring to establish a synthesis of universal and Romanian myths, discovered in the nimble-minded peasant a keeper of age-old wisdom, a spokesman of rustic culture in the most complete sense.

Having persuaded him to begin writing Eminescu introduced Creangă to the Junimea society in the autumn of the year 1875. Creangă's tales, which comprise the largest part of his work, caused surprise and pleasure. The peasant was a strange figure in the drawing rooms of the Pogor house where the Junimea society met, and his prose was unprecedented in Romanian literature. His robust mind had received practically no external influences, maybe only just enough to organize and give shape to his genius. The universe of his tales and of his *Memories of My Boyhood* is a fictive imaginary reflection of the village universe, aesthetically structured. The world he grew up in, the world of the Romanian peasant of northern Moldavia in a certain historical period encompassing the Union of the Romanian principalities in 1859 (see the tales of goodman Ion Roată), as well as the War for Romanian Independence in 1877—78, is reflected in Creangă's work.

Eminescu strongly influenced Creangă especially during the period when the poet, temporarily deprived of means, received joyful and generous hospitality in his friend's humble house. During that year (1876—77) the two lived in a different world, a universe of intensive cultural osmosis, of communication between the "artless poet" Creangă and the "sentimental poet" Eminescu (using the terms of Schiller's aesthetic typology).

Clinging to nature, unadulterated by culture, Creangă offered Eminescu, who through culture had strayed from nature and was yearning for it, the memory of a lost paradise, the thirst for original unity, for the reconciliation of the individual with the universe, something seemingly impossible for the mind of the romantic poet inwardly torn by contradictions. A lover of his people's culture, and a dedicated scholar of the Romanian language, the poet discovered in Creangă a rich thesaurus of popular wisdom and a source of the most savory language. On the other hand, Eminescu realized Creangă's receptivity, his capacity of appropriating, in his own way, the values of world culture. And so he read to the peasant from Humulești pages from

old Romanian writers, as well as translations of the works of important foreign writers, and spoke to him about many things. We do not know what they talked about, but the leap in Creangă's writing after this time implies Eminescu's major beneficial influence.

After this fruitful encounter, Creangă reached the stage of his great stories such as *Ivan and His Bag*, and, of course, his masterpiece, *Memories of My Boyhood*. Creangă's satirical genius glitters in this work. In the normal world of the village he introduces a world "upside down", of gluttons and lazy comic characters, including, first and foremost, himself. These wrong-headed people who cause the stupid and the trustful to get into trouble, leading to explosive comic effects with slightly absurd elements (of folk origin to be sure), are Creangă's most successful aesthetic achievements. As a matter of fact his entire work relies upon a kind of popular wisdom.

Creangă's death in December, 1889, only a few months after that of Eminescu, seems to have deep significance for the affection that indissolubly united their lives. Though deeply dissimilar, the two writers form the two poles of a basic tension in the Romanian universe; a tension between Creangă's village, that Ithaca of his mind, and the infinite horizons of Eminescu's spirit, receiving and achieving numerous syntheses from various parts of the world.

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NOTE ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF ROMANIAN

The purpose of this note is to give English-speaking readers some indications to the correct pronunciation of Romanian words.

Romanian orthography is almost entirely phonetical, a letter representing one and the same sound, in all positions, with a few exceptions.

Here are the letters of the Romanian alphabet and their pronunciation :

a — as *a* in *half*, but shorter. E.g. Smaranda.
ă — as *er* in *father*. E.g. Dănilă, mămăligă.
b — as *b* in *ball*. E.g. Bordeianu.
c — before consonants, before *a, ă, î, o, u*, and at the end of words, as *k* in *sky*. E.g. Creangă, Catinca.
— before *e, i*, as *ch* in *cherry, chin*. E.g. Ocea, Ciubuc.
d — as *d* in *dwell*. E.g. David
e — as *e* in *pen*. E.g. Petre.
f — as *f* in *for*. E.g. Foca
g — before consonants, before *a, ă, î, o, u*, and at the end of words, as *g* in *got*. E.g. Grigore. Gavril.
— before *e, i*, as *g* in *general, gin*. E.g. Cogeasca.
h — as *h* in *behind* E.g. *hora, Humulești*.
— in groups *che, chi, ghe, ghi*, it is mute, having the role of showing that *c* and *g* preserve their original sound.
i — as *ee in see*. E.g. Nichifor.
— in unstressed syllables it is short. E.g. Deleni.
î — similar to *o* in *wisdom* or to *e* in *worse*. E.g. [illegible] Also â.
j — as *s* in *measure*. E.g. Bejeni.
k — as *k* in *kilo*. E.g. Kogălniceanu.
l — as *l* in *like*. E.g. Luca.
m — as *m* in *mother*. E.g. Mărioara.
n — as *n* in *neither*. E.g. Nică.
o — as *o* in *short*. E.g. Onofrei.
p — as *p* in *special*. E.g. Piatra.
r — similar to the rolled *r* of Scotland. E.g. Rusca, Pipirig.
s — as *s* in *soil*. E.g. Stan.
ș — as *sh* in *bush*. E.g. Ștefan, Humulești.
t — as *t* in *stay*. E.g. Trăsnea.
ț — as *ts* in *cats*. E.g. Țuțuieni, Neamț.
u — as *oo* in *look*. E.g. Alecu.
v — as *v* in *voice*. E.g. Vasile.
x — as *x* in *excellent*. E.g. Alexandru.
z — as *z* in *zone*. E.g. Zaharia, Zahei

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